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THE EXCHANGE OF TEA AND HORSES IN TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN CHINA AND CENTRAL ASIA

ОБМЕН ЧАЯ НА ЛОШАДЕЙ В ТОРГОВЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЯХ КИТАЯ И СРЕДНЕЙ АЗИИ

XITOIY-O'RTA OSIYO SAVDO MUNOSABATLARIDA CHOY VA OT ALMASHINUVI

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This article explores the institutional framework and strategic significance of the Cha Ma Si (Tea and Horse Trade Agency) within the broader context of transcontinental commerce along the Silk Road. By examining the agency's role in regulating the exchange of Chinese tea for Central Asian horses, the study highlights how tea and horses functioned as critical economic and military resources. The research draws on historical records from the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties to demonstrate how the Cha Ma Si evolved into one of the earliest state-controlled mechanisms for cross-cultural trade. It also analyzes the ways in which this system contributed to economic integration, border security, and the formation of early globalization processes in Eurasia.

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматриваются институциональные основы и стратегическое значение агентства по торговле чаем и лошадьми (Cha Ma Si) в более широком контексте трансконтинентальной торговли вдоль Шёлкового пути. Исследование освещает роль агентства в регулировании обмена китайского чая на среднеазиатских лошадях, подчеркивая важность этих товаров как ключевых экономических и военных ресурсов. На основе исторических источников династий Сонг, Юань и Мин демонстрируется, как Cha Ma Si превратилось в один из первых государственных механизмов, контролирующих межкультурную торговлю. Также анализируются способы, с помощью которых данная система способствовала экономической интеграции, обеспечению безопасности на границах и становлению процессов ранней глобализации в Евразии.

Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada Buyuk Ipak yo'li bo'ylab amalga oshirilgan transkontinental savdo aloqalarida Choy va Ot savdosi agentligi (Cha Ma Si)ning institutsional tuzilmasi va strategik ahamiyati tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot Xitoy choyi evaziga Markaziy Osiyo otlari bilan amalga oshirilgan almashuv jarayonini tartibga solishda ushbu agentlikning o'rnini yoritadi. Choy va otlar iqtisodiy hamda harbiy jihatdan muhim resurs sifatida qay darajada ahamiyatli bo'lgani ochib beriladi. Maqolada Song, Yuan va Min sulolalari davriga oid tarixiy manbalarga asoslanib, Cha Ma Sining madaniyatlararo savdo uchun ilk davlat nazoratidagi mexanizmlardan biriga aylangani ko'rsatiladi. Tadqiqot, shuningdek, ushbu tizimning iqtisodiy integratsiya, chegaraviy xavfsizlik va Yevrosiyodagi ilk globalizatsiya jarayonlariga qanday hissa qo'shganini ham tahlil qiladi.

Key words: Silk Road, Cha Ma Si, tea-horse trade, Chinese history, institutional trade systems, Central Asia, medieval globalization.

Ключевые слова: Шёлковый путь, Cha Ma Si, торговля чаем и лошадьми, история Китая, институциональные торговые системы, Центральная Азия, средневековая глобализация.

Kalit so'zlar: Buyuk ipak yo'li, Cha Ma Si, choy-ot savdosi, Xitoy tarixi, institutsional savdo tizimlari, Markaziy Osiyo, o'rta asr globalizatsiyasi.

INTRODUCTION

The Great Silk Road is not merely an ancient trade route, but also a crucial direction for centuries-old economic, cultural, and diplomatic connections between world civilizations [10; 242 p.]. It served as a means for exchanging not only goods but also ideas, religions, technologies, and works of art between the major empires of Asia and Europe [6; 8 p.]. The process of trade along this

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route laid the foundation for the earliest globalization processes in human history and initiated economic integration processes between countries.

This road began in Chang'an (present-day Sian) - the capital of the Tang Empire, and proceeded through the Gansu Valley to the city of Dunxuan, where it split into two main routes around the Taklamakan Desert: the Northern and Southern roads. The Northern route skirted the northern edge of the Taklamakan Desert, going from Dunxuan to Kashgar via the cities of Hami, Turfan, Kucha, and Aksu. The Southern route led from Dunxuan to Kashgar through Miran, Cherchen, Khotan, and Yarkand. Both routes ultimately converged in Kashgar and continued along the Central Asian trade route. According to the information provided, the cities of Kashgar and Dunxuan were considered the primary transit trade centers at the beginning of the Silk Road. Notably, due to its dual military and economic importance, Dunxuan became the most crucial center on the Silk Road between China and Inner Asia. The route was divided into two branches. These were: the Southern route - running through the inner territories, and the Northern route - passing through Shule (Kashgar) to Davan (present-day Fergana), Sogd, and from there onwards to India and Western Asia [4; 28 p.].

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Numerous sources and historical literature, as well as scientific and methodological works and articles devoted to the history of trade and diplomatic relations between Central Asia and China, such as "Chju Shu Jinyan" ("Bamboo Annals"), "Mu-Tyanzi chjuan" ("An Account of Mu, the Son of God»), "Records of the Grand Historian: Han Dynasty" (Shiji) [9], "History of the Han Dynasty" (Han Shu) [15], and "Sui Shu" [16] serve as primary sources.

In addition, local historians such as A. Khodjayev [21; 22; 23;], A. Anorboev [14], U. Mavlonov [17], M.Z. Orziyev [19] and E.V. Rtveladze [20] have written extensively about the history of the Silk Road, trade relations between states, and the historical roots and significance of horse trade. Furthermore, M.B. Mamatova's research work "Чай и Чайный путь в истории народов Узбекистана" [18] also places particular emphasis on the role of tea products in the trade system of the Silk Road.

This article, dedicated to the activities of the Tea and Horse Trade Agency along the Silk Road, employs a range of methods and approaches commonly used in social and human sciences – including analysis, synthesis, and analogical comparison – to conduct a comprehensive scholarly investigation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Foreign trade flourished in the Tan Empire. An extensive trade system developed through caravan routes stretching from the capital Chang'an to Central Asia, Afghanistan, Nepal, and India [11; 39-40 p.]. During this period, China's main export products were silk, porcelain items, paper, bronze, iron, and tea. As trade volumes expanded and international relations developed, organized economic companies began to emerge along the Great Silk Road, either as independent entities or under state control. These took the form of certain trade associations or organizations that regulated commercial relations. Notably, in 714, the government established a customs office called Shibosi (Directorate of Foreign Ships) to regulate maritime trade [1; 33 p.]. This structure continued to function through the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties.

During the Song dynasty, the invention of the compass further developed maritime trade, particularly enabling China to establish trade relations with over 50 countries. The Arab Caliphate was China's largest trading partner by sea. Considering the limited opportunities for maritime trade at that time, we can conclude that China's main trading partners primarily engaged in economic relations via land routes.

There were also state organizations that regulated land-based trade relations. Among such organizations, we can mention the Chamasi (Chinese: 茶 (cha) - tea, 马 (ma) - horse, 司 (si) - administration or agency - meaning "Tea-Horse Agency" or "State Office for Managing Tea-Horse Trade") organization [8]. This agency centralized the purchase of horses from abroad through tea exports. Tea, being a unique and valuable Chinese product, was offered in barter exchange for horses [12].

Initially, this organization consisted of two separate institutions: the Tijusi, responsible for overseeing tea production, and the Mazheng, the equine administration. Over time, in 1074, the Emperor of China's Song dynasty established the Chamasi («Tea and Horse Office») in the city of

Chengdu. This agency was tasked with regulating the exchange of tea for horses in markets along the northwestern borders. However, it would be incorrect to assume that tea and horse trade relations between China and neighboring regions began only in the 11th century. Long before this period, commercial exchanges were already active, with China trading its silk goods with the countries of the western regions. By the 11th century, however, silk production had also begun to develop independently in these western lands. For instance, from the late 4th century, silk production was established in Sogdiana, and by the 6th century, it had also been introduced in Persia and Byzantium [2; 422 b.]. This is further evidenced by the historical account of Maniakh, a Sogdian merchant and envoy of the Turkic Khaganate, who was sent to Persia and Byzantium. As a result, it became increasingly difficult for China to export its silk products to the western regions. Nevertheless, China's demand for Central Asia's legendary «heavenly horses» – Tianma – remained strong.

Later, silk lost its status as China's primary export commodity. As a result, the Song government began regulating trade in order to meet the growing demand for horses — a vital strategic and economic resource. It established control over tea trade and introduced a customs system for incoming trade caravans. Furthermore, all commercial exchanges were brought under full state control and could only be conducted through the Tea and Horse Trade Agency. Without the agency's authorization, the buying or selling of tea and horses was strictly prohibited [7].

An overview of this organization's operations shows that Cha Ma Si (茶马司) – the Tea and Horse Office was a state institution in ancient China responsible for managing the trade of tea in exchange for horses. It oversaw the collection of tea produced in government-owned factories and its transportation to frontier regions. The tea was exchanged for horses at border markets, primarily in Tibet, Central Asia, Yunnan, and other neighboring areas [13; 30 p.]. Private merchants were also allowed to purchase tea from the factories, pay the necessary taxes, and conduct exchanges at frontier markets. The revenue generated from this trade was allocated to finance border defense. The office strictly regulated these border markets and closely supervised the trade process to ensure order and fairness in tea and horse transactions [3]. According to some historians, this system represents one of the earliest institutionalized forms of resource exchange between the East and the West.

In 1128, the system of directly purchasing tea for domestic trade was abolished in China. Initially implemented in Sichuan and later extended throughout the entire country, a certification mechanism was introduced for those engaged in tea commerce. As a result, a special licensing system for tea trade was established. Under this system, merchants were required to pay a permit tax (yinshui) amounting to ten percent of the product's base cost. Only those holding such a license were authorized to engage in trade, transport tea to border markets, sell it there, and purchase horses in return.

The Chamasi agency itself was divided into two main sections: maichachang – tea trading stalls, where only tea products were sold, and maimachang – the horse trading area, where horse exchanges took place. This system contributed significantly to strengthening the state's economic and military capabilities. In particular, it increased the revenues collected by the state treasury and established a systematic mechanism for acquiring horses to supply the military forces.

Each year, this organization facilitated the acquisition of horses from Tibetan tribes and Central Asian merchants in exchange for tea products sourced from Yunnan and Sichuan. According to one study, during the Northern Song period, over 20,000 horses were obtained annually through tea-for-horse exchanges. The total volume of tea produced in Sichuan province reached 30 million jin (approximately 15 million kilograms), with at least half of it being sold to Tibet.

The agency continued its operations under subsequent dynasties. The Yuan dynasty also paid great attention to tea trade and established a governing body known as Xifanchatijusi, responsible for managing tea commerce [13; 30-31 p.]. Initially, trade remained under strict state control, but over time it gradually transitioned into the hands of private merchants.

During the Ming dynasty, tea and horse trade experienced its peak. The Ming court established the Chakesi – the Tea and Horse Trade Office – to oversee and manage this flourishing commercial activity.

CONCLUSION

The trade in horses and tea conducted along the Silk Road was not only of economic significance, but also carried substantial military and political importance. In particular, state-controlled institutional structures such as Cha Ma Si (the Tea and Horse Trade Agency) operated to meet China's strategic needs – supplying military strength through horses and stabilizing the domestic market via tea trade.

Research indicates that organizations involved in international trade – whether they were customs offices (Shibosi) or exchange agencies (Chamasi) – served as innovative economic mechanisms for their time. These institutions ensured the security of trade routes, maintained price stability, and established legal and formal frameworks for economic relations.

China's demand for horse trade, especially for the so-called "heavenly horses" of Central Asia, drove the deepening of commercial ties between China and Central Asia. Tea, in turn, served as a key commodity in exchange and functioned as an economic equivalent to currency for China.

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