



PROJECT MUSE®

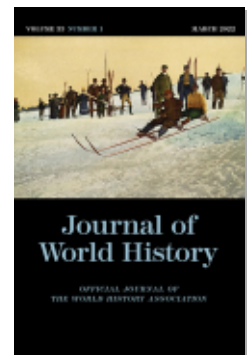
Breaking the Containment: Horse Trade between the Ming
Empire and its Northern Neighbors, 1368–1570

Liping Wang, Geng Tian

Journal of World History, Volume 33, Number 1, March 2022, pp. 37-71 (Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2022.0001>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/850438>

Breaking the Containment: Horse Trade between the Ming Empire and its Northern Neighbors, 1368–1570*

LIPING WANG AND GENG TIAN

This paper examines the tributary horse trade between Ming China and the northern tribes and states from 1368 to 1570, when an expansive Ming Empire turned toward a defensive position. Concurrent with this reorientation of the empire were reshufflings of the tributary relations binding the Ming to its northern neighbors. Mongols, the war enemies of the Ming, were initially excluded from the horse trade but became a major horse provider later on. Our paper analyzes the timing and causes of such a shift, positing that the changing relations between the Ming and Mongols were both affected by and consequences of their relations with other tributary parties. Our paper offers a new perspective on tributary practices: we examine the differentiation of tributary ties and changes provoked by unforeseeable alterations of interconnections; as well, we analyze the mixed economic/political/cultural motivations that played out in the practices.

KEYWORDS: tribute, trade, Empire, China, Mongols.

THROUGH examination of the horse trade, this paper analyzes the maintenance of the tributary relations binding the Ming Empire with its northern neighbors. Horse was a strategic good circulating among the Ming and its northern neighbors. The Chinese forced the retreat of the Mongols and founded the Ming Empire in 1368, yet battles with the Mongols never ceased in the northern frontier. The Ming court wanted to import cheap horses to defray the costs of war with the Mongols. Horse trade was launched to satisfy this urgent need.

* We want to thank Kato Chan for research assistance in this project, Xiaoli Tian and Paul Joose for their valuable feedback, and the anonymous reviewers of JWH for providing useful comments to improve the manuscript.

The so-called tributary parties of the Ming, including the northeastern groups such as Jurchens and the Uriyangqad, the northwestern Tibetans, Korea, the oasis towns, and Central Asian states, all offered horses—in the name of tribute (*gong*)—to the Ming. Even Mongols, the major challenger of the Ming, became an important provider of military horses after 1425, they continuously engaged in wars with the Ming. From these various sources, the Ming Empire acquired enormous numbers of horses to sustain its protracted war with the Mongols. For their part, the tributary partners obtained lavish gifts, goods satisfying their daily life, political protection, and other things.

How were such relations maintained? As we will show, none of these tributary (trade) connections were maintained intact during the Ming period. They were frequently disrupted by military exigencies, changing political alliances, and economic needs. As we examined the dynamics of changing tributary relations, one question continually arose: was there ever a tribute system binding the Ming with its northern neighbors?

This question has far-reaching comparative significance. Tributary trade, often denoting politically enforced and non-market driven trade, existed in China and other empires and was widely practiced. Classical social theorists identify tribute as a premodern mode of political extraction (Anderson, 1974, pp. 343–347; Marx, 1964; Weber, 1978; 2003, pp. 343–347). Tribute relations, largely coercive, subjected local societies to a central authority. They maintained a gigantic imperial structure, which left little space for initiatives of free trade. Recent scholars of global economy tend to challenge this view (Abu-Lughod, 1989; Amin, 1976; Frank, 1998). Instead of assuming a lack of economic vitality in traditional empires, these scholars reinterpret tribute as disguised trade. Long before the advent of the modern capitalist system, trade proliferated in non-Western empires. All these discussions reduce tribute to a given principle, be it political extraction or trade.

The reductionist understanding of tribute aims to pin down the distinctions between traditional empires (represented by China, for example) and modern states. Tribute is identified as a key character of non-Western, premodern empires, because it is inseparable from a display of political power. It does not match a modern concept of trade. It functions like diplomacy, but condescendingly connects a powerful empire to its *inferior* neighbors. It shows the *oddity* of tribute, which cannot be comfortably categorized as trade or diplomacy according to the western norms.

When the term tribute system is used, the orientalist gaze is reinforced. The tributary relations, however irregular and fluctuating in reality, are oftentimes portrayed as neatly binding China and its neighboring states into a concentric system, depending on the degree of their cultural similarity. The tribute system supposedly constituted an alternative Sino-centric world order, distinctively based on cultural sharing rather than competition (Fairbank, 1968; Hevia, 2009; Kang, 2010; Hamashita, 2008). It promoted the regional stability in East Asia before the intrusion of the western inter-state system. There have been persistent efforts to debunk this idea though, by examining the variation in the practices of tributary relations rather than reiterating the rhetorical ideals. They show comparative differences and temporal transmutations in tributary practices (Fletcher, 1968; Rossabi, 1997; Sperling, 1981). They document the specific decisions and adjustments in tribute policy making, but make it hard to argue if any holistic perspective would be useful in deciphering the operation of the tributary affairs.

Our paper is an attempt to address these unresolved problems regarding tributary relations. We study the changing scales and tributary partners of the horse trade between the Ming and its northern neighbors. Although the scale of tributary trade was far smaller than that of the private trade (Nakajima, 2018), tributary trade played an important role in formalizing official interactions and sustaining the geopolitical relationship. The rise and decline of tributary trade, often accompanying the cessation or resumption of wars, sharply indicated the changing geopolitical relationship. Thus, horse trade provides us an angle to perceive the strategies used by the Ming imperial rulers to fortify its position vis-à-vis its major power contender (i.e., the Mongols), and the maneuvers made by minor political powers in between to respectively strengthen their strongholds.

We also avoid naming the tributary relations a system, because it was not a strictly hierarchical structure and the Ming was not an unchallengeable hegemon.¹ The dynamic of the relations resembles power balance more than domination.² Mongol mobility was the

¹ Waldron (2005), Wang (2011), Perdue (2015) and a few others already offer useful critiques of the static and systematic view of tribute.

² Although our paper does not employ terms in international relations to define the Ming relations with its tributary partners, we do find some concepts in the field of international relations helpful in clarifying our questions. In the Ming relations with its northern neighbors inhabiting the fringes of Inner and Central Asia, Ming was not an unquestionable local hegemon, because it was unable to completely subdue the Mongol forces. Both Ming China and its tributary partners swiftly made and remade alliances

biggest contingency in these concatenated relations. The Ming rulers tried their best to contain the Mongols. They used horse trade to corner the Mongols, and later when that policy was bankrupt, to effectively negotiate with the Mongols. Yet, the Mongols' movements were unpredictable, which greatly strained Ming's relations with other tribute parties.

The key to this diplomatic order is interconnections. These interconnections cannot be reduced to a given principle, be it economic interests, political coercion, or cultural sharing. All these principles functioned, but they carried different weight for different parties. For example, cultural sharing fortified Sino-Korea tribute relations more than others. Yet, economic interests greatly sustained Ming-Central Asia relations. Moreover, when the Ming Empire was strong and ambitious, the rhetoric of cultural sharing seemed a sound justification of the distribution of tribute. But when the empire contracted and its power was contested by the nomads, practical calculations of economic and political interests better explain the Ming actions. Most importantly, we need to transcend the conventional model of bilateral relationship to perceive the concatenation of tributary relations. The Ming strategies toward the Mongols were never separate from its strategies toward the Jurchens, the Uriyangqad, the Tibetans and other tributary partners, whereas the Mongols never ceased using the Ming's tributary partners as a springboard for expanding its influence over the Ming.

In the following discussion, we will focus on two periods of the Ming: an expansive phase (1368–1425) and a more contractive phase (1426–1570).³ We examine how in the first stage the Ming emperors initiated horse trade with different tributary partners, but excluded the Mongols; why in the second stage Mongols became the major horse provider, when the diplomatic order intended by the Ming fell apart.

HORSE TRADE IN THE MING

Our paper focuses on a special good, horses. The Ming Empire consisted of 13 provinces in China proper and 9 defense areas in its frontiers, and

between each other, which produced great uncertainty in local security. These changes look like power balance.

³The Mongol threat somehow diminished after 1570 for complex reasons, which changed the geopolitical landscape in the north of China. Our paper therefore stops at 1570 and leaves later developments for another paper.

ruled over 6.5 million km² of territory. It reportedly had a population of more than 60 million people in 1393, which was approximately one-fifth of the world population.⁴ Production and trade in the Ming Empire contributed to its status as one of the greatest economies in the world at the time. The Ming court mainly needed horses in the wars with the Mongols. Yet, the cost of raising horses on its own was intimidating.⁵ Importing horses from its northern neighbors, who were more capable horse breeders, was economically desirable (Yang, 2004). In fact, not only China but other empires also found trading horses a cheap way to satisfy military needs. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Mughal expansion southward through the Indian subcontinent generated a large demand for horses for military purposes. Central Asia was their natural supplier, both in the west along with Persia and farther east in Tibet and Yunnan (Burton, 1993; Richard, 1983).

The utilitarian interests in horse trade were a focal point, but this need should not veil the political/diplomatic control associated with the horse trade. The tributary groups needed horse trade, not just to acquire basic means of life (Lattimore, 1940; Wang, 2009), but also to acquire luxuries, which had a critical function in tribal societies. Silk and satin were luxury goods most desired by the tribal chieftains to distribute as gifts to their underlings, thus promoting their symbolic authority. The Ming court also implemented specific procedures to administer trade. The routes for the tributary missions and the places for transaction were strictly defined. Moreover, the court devised elaborate restrictions on what goods could be exchanged/not exchanged with different peoples. It reserved tea-horse exchange to Tibetans only, even though Mongols craved tea.

The horse trade was thus driven by mixed interests. As Hamashita (2008: 18) argues, tributary relationship was conducive to commercial exchange. Cultural commonality was not a prerequisite, but was

⁴ However, some scholars warned that the later figures were severely inflated, as there was supposedly a population of over 100 million or even close to 200 million in 1600 (see Mote and Twitchett, 1998, p. 14).

⁵ The Ming government initially tried to raise horses through *Yuanma si* (Pasturage Office) (Rossabi, 1970, p. 138). However, the pasture land of *Yuanma si* was persistently shrinking under the encroachment of farming and occupation by local magnates (including governmental officials and powerful landlords). In 1409, in the province of Shensi, the *Yuanma si* had twenty-four pasture areas but by the end of the fifteenth century only six remained. Importation gradually became the major source for military horses.

reinforced in tributary relationship. However, China traditionally established tributary relations with Mongolian and Tibetan people who did not have strong sense of Confucian rituals. In our paper, the horse trade took mixed forms, including tribute missions, regulated official markets with fixed quota, and private trade. Formal tribute permits guaranteed the tributary status and were most important. Once the relationship was confirmed, tribute embassies were allowed to exchange special goods for gifts with the Ming court. This is tribute trade in its narrowest sense. When the relationship was stabilized, official markets often granted the tributary partners wider access to trade and regular trade contact was established (Hou, 1938). In the tribute system, private trade was never absent. Private markets mushroomed where official trade contact was deepened. Private merchants also often traded in the name of tribute missions. However, because the data on private trade is unavailable and it was not, strictly speaking, tribute trade, we will exclude it from our discussion. We will particularly focus on tribute missions and official markets, on which we have collected thorough data.

We had a thorough collection of data on tribute missions and horse markets. We extracted the primitive data from important secondary works. For the primary research, we used the database created by Academia Sinica, Taiwan. The key sources in the database are *Ming Shi Lu* (The Veritable Ming History, henceforth MSL, the edition of National Beiping Library Microfilm), *Ming Shi* (The History of Ming, henceforth MS edition of *Wu ying dian* of the Qing, compiled by Zhang Tingyu et al., and reprinted by *Dingwen shu ju* in 1980), and *Ming Jingshi Wenbian* (MJSWB, the edition compiled by Chen Zilong, and reprinted by *Zhonghua Shuju* in 1962).

The results of these researches are systematically compared to verify the validity of numbers. These primary sources greatly expand our dataset and also show a few errors in years and numbers in the primitive data we collected from the secondary sources. These data are compiled into two appendices at the end of the article.

From these data, we detect changes in the trend of horse trade before 1571. We divide the period between 1368 and 1570 into two stages. The major horse suppliers of the Ming shifted from Korea/Central Asia/northwestern Tibetans to Mongols. Our central task is to explain this shift.

LOCKING IN THE MONGOLS: THE FOUNDATIONAL GOAL OF THE TRIBUTE SYSTEM (1368–1424)

The first stage lasted from the founding of the Ming to the end of the reign of Yongle emperor, that is, 1368–1424. This was the period of the Ming expelling the Mongols and establishing a Chinese Empire.⁶ Being neither introverted nor particularly xenophobic, the early Ming Empire inherited from its predecessor, the Mongol Empire, an imperial vision that engaged it in active interactions with Inner and Central Asian power holders. It displayed cosmopolitanism rather than isolation, through recruiting Mongol officials, patronizing Tibet Buddhism, and using other means to warrant its attraction among the nomadic and semi-nomadic people, to make believable that the Mandate of Heaven had been transferred from the Mongols to the Chinese (Robinson, 2013, pp. 5, 16). To beat the Mongols, the Ming court not only needed to demonstrate its cultural legitimacy, it also needed to show its military capacity. To do so, it desperately needed military horses. It swiftly established tributary relations with Central Asia, Korea, the north-western Tibetans,⁷ and the northeastern tribes, and conducted horse trade with them.

Appendix 1 shows the recorded numbers of horses acquired by the Ming from tribute missions (first part) and horse markets (second part)

⁶ It should be noted that the Mongols were not a unified people in this period. With the foundation of the Ming in 1368, the capital of the Yuan empire was relocated to the steppe. There existed a unitary Mongol power with the Great Khan at center and several major allies such as Naghachu, Köke-Temür, and Vajravarmi and lesser allies of smaller kingdoms such as Hami and Shazhou, until the assassination of Tögüs Temür in 1388. Tögüs Temür's death was attributed to Jorightu Khan Yesüder, who was backed by Oirat. The major divisions of Mongols, including the Oirats in the west, the Uriyangqad in the northeast, and the Khorchin between the two, were engaged in strife. The Uriyangqad Mongols surrendered to the Ming dynasty in the 1390s and were granted permits to trade horses with Ming. The Ming rulers never treated the Mongols as a whole, but always differentiated them into allies and enemies.

⁷ Yuan court's administrative separation of Ü-Tsang and Dokham since mid-thirteenth century continued to affect Ming's court administration of the Tibetan areas. In early Ming, the Tibetans achieved an internal political unity with the rise of the Phagmodrupa dynasty with the support of Ming. While other Tibetan leaders, nobles, and elites venerated the authority of the Phagmodrupa dynasty, Ü-Tsang remained the dynastic center and Dokham stayed peripheric not only because of its distance from the political center but also of its physical proximity and affiliation with Ming's garrison systems. The northwestern Tibetans we study includes the Tibetans from Dokham, who were also the major participant of the Tea-horse trade. They lived on the Gansu-Tibet border when Gansu was governed by a garrison system rather than through civilian administration. There was a mix of nomadism, agriculture, and hunting carried out in this area. Since Medieval China, the Tibetans have traded pastoral products, herbs, and furs with merchants from inland China for other daily life necessities and luxuries. Tea was central to the trade.

in the first stage.⁸ Horse markets mainly apply to the northeastern tribes and the northwestern Tibetans (tea-horse markets). These data show that horses coming from the tributary missions led by Korea and Central Asian kingdoms (including Timurid Samarkand, Hami, and Turfan), and the horses coming from the tea-horse markets for Tibetans, constitute the majority of the horse trade. The Ming also acquired horses from the markets opened for the Jurchens⁹ and the Uriyangqad Mongols, but more symbolically. It is noteworthy that Mongols did not contribute horses until 1408,¹⁰ when they were temporarily reunited under two major chieftains. In the first stage, Mongols contributed only a very small portion of horses.

How to explain such an uneven distribution of horse trade? The Ming rulers did not view its relations with the tributary parties in a uniform way. To explain the differentiation, we will proceed from both cultural and geopolitical perspectives. Cultural norms are important to explain the Ming preference for trading with certain peoples.¹¹ These norms originated from a stock of knowledge transmitted by Chinese dynasties in developing their relations with tribute-sending peoples. However, the Ming policies did not dogmatically abide by these cultural norms.

China had a long history of relations with non-Chinese neighbors and accumulated a stock of knowledge and interactive tactics for dealing with them. This knowledge was taken down by scholar-officials and transmitted through history writing. During the formative years of Chinese civilization (Qin-Han period), as Wang (1968) argues, the idea that *zhuxia* (Chinese) were different from and superior to the *yidi* (barbarians) was established. *Shang Shu* (The Book of Documents), delineated the scope of China, including nine provinces, which

⁸ It should be noted that these numbers are based on the Ming records. They are not continuous and complete. Some years lack numbers, which does not mean there is no horse trade at all. For example, it was routine for the Jurchens holding permits to contribute horses to the court yearly. Their visits to the court were not recorded continuously. It is not clear whether they did not visit the court in those years or simply because their visits were too routine and were not worthy of being recorded. However, from the numbers we can detect major changes in the trend of horse trade, even though we cannot confirm if those numbers are literally accurate.

⁹ The Jurchens were not a unified people either. There were three divisions of the Jurchens in the Ming dynasty: the Haixi, Jianzhou, and Donghai Jurchens (the latter were called the wild Jurchens in Ming official documents because they had the least direct contact with the Ming state due to their remote location).

¹⁰ MSL-Taizong reign, vol. 84: 1117(1408). The chieftain of Oirats, Mahmūd, led a tribute mission to the Ming. However, we lack specific number of horses they brought.

¹¹ On the importance of cultural norms for state policy making, see Mitchell (1991), Migdal (2001), Wilson (2011), and Adams (1999).

roughly corresponded to current Hebei, Shandong, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, Henan, Sichuan, Shaanxi, and Shanxi (Ge, 2014, pp. 37–38). Beyond these areas were wild places inhabited by *barbarians*. These ideas prevailed since the periods of Spring and Autumn, and Warring States (770 B.C.–221 B.C.). However, there was not a single view on how the Chinese should deal with the non-Chinese. Conquest and assimilation by force, expulsion of those who resisted, establishing some kind of lord-vassal relationship, and total dismissal were all practiced by the Chinese toward non-Chinese (Wang, 1968).

During the Han dynasty (202 B.C.–220 A.D.), Sima Qian (145 B.C.–86 B.C.), the greatest historian, continuously used these tactics to analyze the Han Empire's interactions with the surrounding non-Chinese peoples. There was one exception to the use of these policies. The Xiongnu, who were real nomads, emerged almost simultaneously with the unification of the Chinese empire (Lattimore, 1940). For Xiongnu, Sima Qian advocated the wisdom of the peace policy and commended the rule of co-existence and non-aggression. In the meanwhile, a Chinese-styled administration was installed in Korea and Vietnam, Chinese migrants kept arriving there, and Chinese literature was promoted. For the countries of Central Asia, the Han rulers endeavored to pursue simultaneously a policy of aggression and one of trade to ensure the Chinese influence, so as to cut off the penetration of the Xiongnu in the west.

All these tactics, ranging from conquest, assimilation, vassalage, cessation of relations, co-existence and diplomacy, were entangled with tributary practices. They mixed with normative distinctions to justify frontier and foreign policies in imperial dynasties of China. Close allies of China were presumably those affected most deeply by the Chinese culture, such as Korea and Vietnam. Nomads (such as Xiongnu and Mongols) were regarded as a persistent threat to the Han Chinese empires. They were inassimilable and unconquerable, and appeared horrendous to the Chinese imagination. The semi-nomadic peoples of Central Asia, culturally distinct from the Chinese, were considered strategically important to the security of China.¹² Tibetans did not enter the view till the Tang dynasty.¹³ They were deemed as culturally

¹² As Rossabi (1997) argues, Chinese had a realistic vision of the people of Hami.

¹³ Tibetans were a big threat to the Tang Empire, but their aggression quickly dissipated after the dissolution of the Tibetan Empire. Their religion was patronized by the Mongol rulers and even the early Ming rulers.

superior to the nomads, but less threatening due to their geopolitical isolation.¹⁴

The Ming rulers indeed employed such normative distinctions and relational tactics to justify horse trade with the northern neighbors. Yet they did not follow the cultural codes dogmatically. We may categorize the horse providers into four sub-groups, that is, Korea, Central Asian states, the northeastern tribes (including Jurchens and Uriyangqad) and the northwestern Tibetans, and the Mongols.

HORSE TRADE WITH KOREA

Korea was a tributary state of the Ming, and its dependency was strengthened by significant cultural sharing with China (e.g., in language, administration, and court rituals). In the beginning, Zhu Yuanzhang, the Hongwu Emperor, divided the frontier non-Chinese into the *buffering barbarians* (*bu zheng zhu yi*), whom the Ming preferred pacifying, and the *barbarian enemies* (*hu rong*), at whom the Ming's military preparation was targeted.¹⁵ Korea was the only horse provider in the list of the *buffering barbarians*. Military means were not sanctioned by the Ming rulers for the 15 buffering states, including Korea. It is known that Korea and the Ryukyu islands (*Liuqiu*) were the only states that fully manifested the tributary ideology written into the diplomatic and investiture rites (Cha, 2011: 40). This was due to the fact that the Korean envoys correctly understood the Confucian cultural norm and conformed to the proper courteous manners.

The amenable relationship between Ming and Korea ensured stable horse trade between them in the first stage. Korea started to offer the new Ming emperor tribute in 1368 right after the Ming dynasty was established. From Appendix 1, we see that the number of tributary horses from Korea appeared earliest (around 1372). Korea was a major horse provider in this period.

It should be noted that the Sino-Korea relationship was not permanently settled in peace. The exemplary tributary relationship between the Ming and Korea did not go without potential oppositions

¹⁴ This knowledge persisted even till the late Qing (1644–1911). A Confucian scholar, Zhang Binglin (2014), argued that Tibetans and Central Asian peoples were cultivated and should not be excluded from China.

¹⁵ MCKGWX.Vol.3: 1588–1591. MSL-Taizu Reign. Vol.68: 4a-b. Zhu Yuanzhang did not list particular names under the general “*hu rong*,” but emphasized that they were from the Ming's northwestern frontiers.

and conflicts, as the two states shared a critical border (Fuma, 2007). The concerns for geopolitical security by both states thus complicated the understanding of the meaning of the tribute, which originally was thought to have grown from cultural sharing.¹⁶

HORSE TRADE WITH TIBETANS

After Korea, the northwestern Tibetans inhabiting Gansu and Ningxia became the second major horse provider. In 1372, the Ming armies defeated the remnants of the Yuan forces in Gansu and the emperor adopted an aggressive military policy in the northwest. At roughly the same time, tea-horse markets were opened for the northwestern Tibetans, basically to attract the loyalty of the Tibetans.

The tea-horse markets were run differently from regular tribute missions. The markets were located near Ming garrison towns, which were closely supervised by the Bureaus of Tea-Horse trade. The Tibetan tribes admitted to trade horses for tea were granted golden plates as trading licenses. The tribal chieftains sent in horses only to the government agents who held the same plates as theirs.¹⁷ In addition, the state fixed the horse quota for each enlisted tribe as well as the amount of tea to pay for these horses. Tea became the only legitimate currency to pay for the horses from the Tibetan tribes. The court counted on receiving approximately 13,800 horses a year from Tibetans.¹⁸

Obviously, the tea-horse markets were more regularly and closely administered than tribute missions. The Tibetans running these markets were viewed as political subordinates. Ming scholar-officials called them *shufan* (cooked Tibetans) who were on duty for the Ming state, different from *shengfan* (raw Tibetans) who lived a primitive and independent life. The Tibetan tea-horse trade with Ming was also ambiguously called *xiaolao jingong* (on tributary duty).¹⁹ The Ming

¹⁶ Ming's relationship with Korea was comparable to its relationship with Southeast Asian protectorates, as both were regarded as *buffering barbarians* assimilated to Chinese culture. However, as Wade (2008, pp. 594–597) argues, the Ming rulers used military forces when necessary to keep order in the Southeast.

¹⁷ MSL-Taizu reign. Vol. 225 (1393): 3295.

¹⁸ Forty-one plates were issued in 1393 to the enlisted Tibetan tribes. The Tibetans living in Hezhou had 21 plates for which 7705 horses were expected. The Xining Tibetans were assigned 16 plates to submit 3050 horses. The same horse quota was assigned to the Tibetans in Taizhou who got 4 plates only, see MS: 1948. Another source had a lesser quota, 3296, for the Xining Tibetans, see Yang, 2001, p. 77.

¹⁹ MJSWB: 447-a.

official Lu Shen said, “Tibetans had never become a major threat of China, but had been perennially troublesome. A good policy of loose rein is the key . . . Unlike native barbarians (*tuyi*), the western Tibetans had their own tribes and their own customs (*zi cheng feng tu*).”²⁰ In other words, Tibetans were not to be denigrated in the way *tuyi* were because of the latter’s cultural inferiority. The gist of a good policy was to avoid military action and instead to lure the Tibetans into cooperation with material benefits.

However, the tea-horse trade did not merely serve the need to control Tibetans. The Ming politicians were acutely aware of the strategic importance of Tibetans in the security of the north of China. The official Yang Yiqing remarked, “The Tibetans were on duty to provide horses for the Ming . . . because Tibetans have always occupied a crucial defense zone of China.”²¹ The precedents of the Han dynasty were illustrated to emphasize that Tibetans, if used properly, could prevent the wars with Xiongnu. Consequently, “the strategy is to pacify the Tibetans and limit the expansion of northern caitiffs.”²² No doubt the Ming politicians expected to use the tea-horse trade to cut off a potential Mongol-Tibetan link.

HORSE TRADE WITH CENTRAL ASIA

Before the triumph of the European maritime trade, the Central Asian caravan trade linked Europe, the Middle East and China. It developed as early as the Han dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 220) and flourished during the Han and Tang (A.D. 618–907) before it was disrupted by the northwestern turbulence prevailing during the Song dynasty (A.D. 920–1279). In the era of the Mongol empire, the land-based caravan trade revived and thrived, though in a diminished scale, even till the early Ming. Such long-distance trade was extremely precarious, suffering from bandit harassment and other safety issues (Rossabi, 1990). The stability of the oasis towns, such as Hami, Khotan, and Samarkand, which were key nodes in the caravan trading networks, was pivotal to the trade’s continuation.

The Ming rulers were interested in high-quality horses produced in Central Asia and were equally keen to secure the connections with Central Asia. The Central Asian states were internally divided in the

²⁰ MJSWB: 1555-b.

²¹ MJSWB: 1071-a.

²² Ibid.

Ming court's view: Hami came close to being a vassal state of the Ming, and some (like Turfan and Samarkand) stood more independently, showing hostility to the Ming. Their tributary status was ambiguous, but their trading interests were paramount.²³ Appendix 1 shows that Hami, Turfan and Samarkand were major tribute-horse providers in the early stage.

Among the three states, horse-tribute missions sent by Hami were most frequent. The Yongle emperor granted a hereditary prince title (*zhongshun wang*) to the ruler of Hami in 1403, making Hami a vassal state of the Ming. "Hami was a fence protecting Central Kingdom (*zhongguo*), and the tribute delegates from other places were reported by Hami to the Ming."²⁴ The Ming officials were clearly aware of the strategic importance of keeping Hami in Ming's hands: "(controlling Hami) makes it possible to cut off the right wing of northern barbarian (*beidi*), disrupt the connections with western barbarian (*xiqiang*), and facilitate communications with outside barbarian (*rongyi*)."²⁵ Here *beidi* refers to the Mongols, *xiqiang* probably refers to the groups of Qiang or Tibetans, and the outside *rongyi* probably refers to other Central Asian groups. Obviously, Hami served as a hinge connecting China to multiple non-Chinese groups.

But the remoter Central Asian states, such as Turfan and Samarkand, were different. Ming viewed them as tributary states because their people's visits enhanced a self-image of Ming as a superior center. Their merchants frequently visited China, but very often the envoys were private merchants who did not represent their rulers' will. In fact, their rulers did not acknowledge themselves as subordinates of the Ming.²⁶ The discrepancy in mutual understanding however did not prevent the continuation of envoys and gift exchanges.

²³ Fletcher (1968, pp. 207–208) argues that this was because the Ming state did not recognize Central Asian tradesmen who were not part of a diplomatic mission coming from a vassal state.

²⁴ MJSWB: 1849-a.

²⁵ MJSWB: 1911-b.

²⁶ Timur of Samarkand openly denounced the superior kingship of the Ming emperors, see Fletcher (1968: 210) records an interesting episode in interaction between Yongle emperor and the Timurids. Yongle emperor addressed himself "lord of the realms of the face of the world" in the diplomacy. Timur's son Shāhrukh responded in Arabic and Persian respectively, with an advice that the Ming emperor should adopt Islam. In the official letter written on behalf of Emperor Yongle in 1410, the imperial tone was moderated so that the letter reads like the emperor honors his political equals afar. However, when the ambassadors finally reached Beijing, a fully hierarchical ceremony was set up, indicating that the emperor still assumed for himself a lordship over all on the face of the earth.

HORSE TRADE WITH NORTHEASTERN TRIBES

The trade with Tibetans and Central Asian states was crucial to diminish the Mongol influence in the northwest. Almost at the same time, the Ming emperor found the biggest threat coming from the northeast. In 1374, the Yuan official Kōke Temür, who controlled the Yuan emperor then, stubbornly resisted the Ming armies and moved his troops to eastern Mongolia. The Ming emperor viewed the Yuan rulers who maintained their claim to be emperor-in-exile of China as the most formidable competitor. It thus shifted its focus to the northeast.²⁷ In 1389, Uriyangqad Mongols, the descendants of Genghis Khan's officials, submitted to the Ming Empire. They were allocated in Duoyan, Fuyu, and Taining commanderies. The Jurchens also swore loyalty to the Ming. Like the Tibetan horse breeders in the northwest, they were treated like affiliates, ruled by native chieftains appointed by the Ming.

To these affiliates, the Ming court lavishly granted permits of tribute trade and opened horse markets. The Uriyangqad acquired approximately 300 tribute permits under the Yongle reign, and were allowed to pay tribute visits twice a year (*Te-mu-le*, 2007). Every tribute permit nominally brought in one horse for each visit. The tribes of Jianzhou and Hanxi Jurchens owned around 1,000 permits. Between 1403 and 1435, the Uriyangqad and Jurchens altogether launched 345 missions to the imperial capital (*Long*, 2013).

In addition to tribute missions, official horse markets in Liaodong were established in the Yongle Emperor's fourth year (1406), for the Uriyangqad and Jurchen tribes, regularly held at Guangning and Kaiyuan.²⁸ We lack comprehensive data of horse transactions. From the limited sources (four entries of tribute missions and three entries in *Appendix 1*), we see that the numbers of horses traded with these northeastern tribes was far below the numbers in the Tibetan tea-horse markets and those in the trade with Korea and Central Asia. The modest number is reasonable, because the northeastern tribes were not genuine horse breeders. Instead, they might acquire horses from other places.

Unlike with Korea, Central Asian states, and Tibetans, the Ming court did not rely on northeastern tribes to provide horses. It used trading opportunities to solidify political subordination. Similar to northwestern Tibetans, the northeastern tribes were on duty for the

²⁷ On this change, see *Zhao* (2012, pp. 87–89).

²⁸ MS: 83.

Ming state. “In the northeast, the Jurchens of Jianzhou, Maolian and other Guards, the three commanderies of Uriyangqad, were distributed land and official titles. They traded in markets and conducted tribute missions. It was a loose rein (*jimi*) . . . ” (comments by the Ming official Xu Lun).²⁹ Between Uriyangqad and Jurchens, there were also differences. Jurchens were thought to belong to *dongyi*, a big category stretchable to Koreans. Yet, the ethnic affiliation of the Uriyangqad tribes was more ambiguous. They were considered a branch of *dongyi*, but because of their Mongol origin, they were sometimes indistinguishable from the Mongols (comments by the Ming official Li Xian).³⁰ As in the northwest, the northeast was regarded as a defense zone for China, protected against the infiltration of Mongols. “If we want to exterminate the backup forces of the *northern caitiffs* (*beilu*), we should first pacify the Uriyangqad commanderies. The loyalty of Uriyangqad tribes will be strengthened by material benefits. Proper policies were also in need to control them” (comments by the Ming official Ye Sheng).³¹ The Ming court invested obvious interests in using the trade with the Northeastern tribes to halt the spread of Mongol influence.

Viewed as a whole, the establishment of the tributary relations follows the sequence of Ming pacification of the northern frontiers. It is noteworthy that Mongols were kept out of the tribute system most of the time. The obvious reason is that Mongols were war enemies of the Ming. It is also true that the Chinese held a persistent fear of the Mongols, who were regarded as descendants of Xiongnu. Han Chinese’s fear of northern nomads was caused by their stubborn rejection of Chinese culture and the threat they posed to the security of Chinese regimes (Dikötter, 1992, pp. 27–29). The Ming people also feared the Mongols because they held the Chinese throne before the Ming. The Chinese imagined that the northern Mongols ruled the steppe using the politically savvy means of deliberately choosing rulers to reclaim the Chinese land.³² Any attacks from the Mongols were viewed as intended to recover the Mongolian rule in China. These cultural norms rendered the Mongols unlikely to be a candidate of tribute trade for the Ming.

²⁹ MJSWB: 2436-b.

³⁰ MJSWB: 2436-b; 273-b.

³¹ MJSWB: 473-b.

³² Barfield ([1989] 1992, p. 233) notes that this concern was brought up because Chinese had a penchant for following the “legitimate” line of royal power.

The initiation of the tribute trade by the Ming founders therefore shows a complex story. Underlining the Ming policies of inclusion/exclusion were closely held cultural beliefs. The most favored frontier groups were the northeastern tribes and northwestern Tibetans, who became semi-officials of the Ming. They were given the privilege of trading in horse markets, which ensured more regular commercial contact. Korea was viewed as a protectorate, an intimate partner of the Ming due to their cultural affinity. Central Asian states were differentiated. Hami was a vassal state of the Ming and Turfan was an important source of horse. But remoter states like Samarkand had more uncertain relationships with the Ming. Mongols were detested by the Ming because they were perceived as the most *barbaric* and dangerous to the hereditary kingships.

However, cultural beliefs are too steady to explain the fluctuations of trading relationships. A big change in the later period of the first stage concerns the Mongols. After 1411, Mongols increasingly became major horse providers, but ceased to be in the late fifteenth century. The Ming did not seem to change or deny its views on the barbarism of Mongols. Nevertheless it strategically proceeded with or terminated tribute trade with the Mongols when necessary.

To understand the Ming wavering in supporting or banning trade with the Mongols, we must position the Ming's relations with Mongols in terms of and related to their relations with other tribute partners. The Ming rulers bore in mind the interconnections of the tribute parties, and played the game of maintaining multiple lines of tribute parties to isolate or lock in the Mongols at the beginning. Such a strategy was effective when the Ming military capacity was at its height.

In the long term, however, such a strategy was too demanding and hard to maintain. That indeed happened in the later period of the first stage. Mongols gradually reunited into two major groups. The area of the Altai Mountains was controlled by the western Mongols, or Oirats, led by Mahmud. Central and Southern Mongolia was dominated by eastern Mongols, also called the Tartar Kingdom, led by Arughtai. Neither were of descent, but they competed to form a new confederation. Both sides attempted to open trade with the Ming and kept plundering the border when their requests were not fulfilled. At this point, the Ming had to abandon the "lock-in" strategy, and seek other strategies to negotiate with the prominent Mongol chieftains. Tribute trade was one of them.

NEGOTIATING WITH THE MONGOLS: DRAMATIC METAMORPHOSES OF THE TRIBUTE SYSTEM (1425–1550)

We put the long century between 1425 and 1550 in the second stage. This period saw rapid transformations of the tribute relations, largely induced by Mongols' eastward and westward expansions. The Ming initiated a strategy of "locking in Mongols" when laying down the foundation of the tribute system. This strategy could work only if the Mongols were too weak to break the blockages instituted by the Ming on the eastern and western fronts. However, Mongols were certainly not a passive player in this game.

After 1400, the Mongols' expansion in the northeast and northwest was conspicuous. Pressed by the need to find trade opportunities, Mongols led numerous expeditions to request trade. When these requests were not satisfied, they attacked the Ming border garrisons. Simultaneously, however, the internal power structure of the Mongols was extremely shaky. New and capable chieftains frequently arose and pushed out the old leaders. As a result, multiple Mongol forces, including those who were defeated and those chasing the defeated, moved into the east and the west. These local actions brought Mongolian penetration in the northeast and northwest, and destroyed the tributary relations carefully instituted by the Ming. The primary agency thus shifted from the Ming to the Mongols. It testifies that Ming was not an unchallengeable hegemon in the north of China.

Cultural norms cannot explain these rapid reshufflings of power. We thus focus on actions and the effects of actions feeding back to the actors. As we did in the first section, we examine the distribution of trading opportunities in this period. [Appendix 2](#) shows that tribute missions from Mongols brought in the majority of horses to the Ming. Frequency and number of horse trade with Korea sharply declined after 1427, and with Central Asia after 1455. The horse transactions with Tibetans sharply declined and became significantly less frequent after 1450. We lack clear information about the horse trade with the Jurchens and the Uriyangqad. However, the total number of horses acquired in the northeastern markets by the Ming must have remained small.³³

The general trend in this period is that Mongols became the major horse provider, while other tribute parties became less and less

³³ In the MSL, we find a few entries recording the activities of these horse markets in the northeast. However, we don't find specific number of horses transacted in the northeastern horse markets after 1425. We can tell from the sources that those markets still operated, perhaps being interrupted a few times.

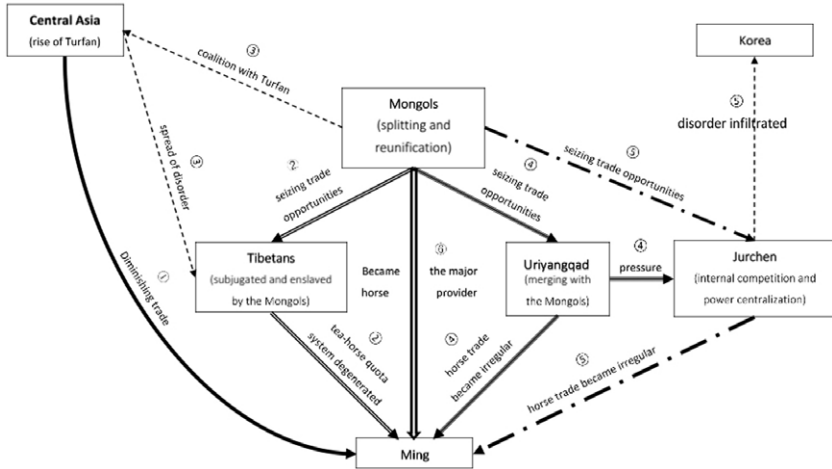


CHART 1. Ming and the Northern Tributary parties, 1425–1570.

significant to the Ming. There are almost yearly records of the number of horses brought by the Mongol tribute missions between 1411 and 1455.³⁴ However, after 1455, the Mongol tribute missions became irregular, almost disappearing between 1488 and 1550.

How to explain the redistribution of trading opportunities? Again, to make sense of it, we must observe Ming's relations with these tributary parties and their interrelations. The key players, including Mongols and Ming, underwent dramatic changes in their internal organization and visions. The Chinese emperors succeeding Yongle lacked ambition and avoided over-involvement in Inner and Central Asian politics unless his northern border was bothered by the Mongols. The Mongols experienced temporary unification under powerful leaders and then rapid dispersion when these chieftains died or being killed. Each round of the Mongols' reorganization propelled a reshuffling of the Ming's relations with other tribute parties. Even the rebalancing of remote players, that is, the Central Asian powers, generated wide repercussions affecting the Mongols and Tibetans. Consequently, the Ming's relations with its various tribute parties altered substantially (for a quick overview of the relations see [Chart 1](#)).

³⁴ Before 1434, Tartar Mongols led by Arughtai were the major carriers of tribute missions. After 1434, the Oirat Mongols became the major carriers of tribute missions, demonstrating that the eastern Mongols were gradually eclipsed by the western Mongols.

DECLINE OF TRADE WITH CENTRAL ASIA

Let's first explain the diminishing horse trade in the west, which resulted from the local actions of Mongols and the remote Central Asian partners. The drop of horse trade with Central Asian states is evident in [Appendix 2](#). We only find four entries recording the numbers of horses carried by Hami embassies, even though [Watanabe \(1975\)](#) shows that 78 horse tribute missions came from Hami. We found one record of the number of horses brought from Samarkand, even though [Watanabe \(1975\)](#) shows they led 16 horse tribute missions to the Ming. We found no record of the number of horses from Turfan, but [Watanabe \(1975\)](#) records 15 missions. Most of these missions were only mentioned in MSL with no further details. The lack of horse numbers attests to the declining importance of horse trade, and perhaps to an actual decline of horse trade with Central Asia.

The downturn became significant after the mid-fifteenth century. The causes for the shrinking of the horse trade with Central Asia are complicated. First, hosting tribute missions became a tremendous financial burden for the Ming.³⁵ In 1465, the Ming decided to restrict the size of the Turfan mission to no more than ten envoys and allowed one mission to come every three to five years.³⁶

Second, the internal reorganization of Central Asian powers changed Ming relations with the tribute parties in the west. The succession crisis ensuing after the assassination of Timur's grandson, Ulugh Beg, in 1449 greatly attenuated the contact between Central Asia and Ming. The rise and expansion of a new power holder in Central Asia, that is, the Moghul state of Turfan, further diminished Ming influence. The Moghuls were Muslim descendants of Genghis Khan's Mongols. The Moghulistan Mongol prince took virtual control of Turfan between the 1470s and 1490s. The rise of Turfan posed a formidable threat to the security of Hami and threatened to cut off the Ming connection with Central Asia. As a result, we see the horse importation from Central Asia precipitately declined.

DECAY OF THE TIBETAN TEA-HORSE MARKETS

As the Ming relationship with Central Asia became more intense, adverse impacts spilled over to the northwestern frontier, where the

³⁵ Some large Central Asian missions could amass as many as two or three thousand men stayed in China for six to nine months, see [Rossabi \(1972, p. 214\)](#).

³⁶ MSL-Xianzong region. Vol. 22: 3b-4a.

Tibetan tea-horse markets were located. The tea-horse markets not only suffered from the disorder caused by Ming's deteriorating relationship with Central Asia, but they also faced tremendous costs. Because tea, the prime good exchanged for horses, was monopolized by the state, the tea-horse market was financially vulnerable on two points. First, the state had to bear all the costs of producing, making, storing and transporting tea. Second, the state monopoly dictated a higher price of tea than the market price. The Ming government could not prevent the Tibetans from trading horses with private tea smugglers.³⁷ Consequently, the best horses were more likely to be found in the private markets than in the official markets.

Above all, the tea-horse markets were jeopardized by the wars with the Mongols. According to our calculation, Mongols led at least 23 expeditions against the Tibetans in this period. These military actions were largely induced by the internal splitting and reorganization of the Mongols. The death of the Oirat leader Esen in 1455 was a critical turning point. When Esen was alive, his political power actually connected Ming to Central Asia. After 1455, Turfan—then controlled by the Moghulistan Mongol prince—expanded toward the east, threatening the Ming order in the northwest. The new Oirat leader Ibrahim made coalitions with Turfan to attack the northwest. Ibrahim's forces joined with Turfan sultan Mansūr's (1484/1485 to 1545/1546) forces and seriously endangered the Gansu-Tibet border during the first two decades of the sixteenth century.³⁸ They subjugated the Tibetans and led them to break their loyalty with the Ming.³⁹

Viewed in a broader context, the Mongol chieftain Ibrahim's alliance with Turfan was not an isolated incident. Ibrahim himself was a victim of the expansion of the new Mongol Khan Batü Möngke (1464–1524) arising in the east. In 1516, when Batü Möngke's soldiers impinged on the northwest, Ibrahim had to give up the bases he had acquired and find new ones. This change caused a new wave of

³⁷ MSL-Yingzong reign. Vol. 133 (1445): 2639. According to this record, the Ming state had discovered that officials profited from selling part of the monopolized tea for their own good. Smuggling had been an enduring issue. As late as 1530s, records show that civilians in Sichuan smuggled tea to trade with the Tibetans at Gansu privately. MSL-Shizong reign. Vol. 140 (1532): 3265.

³⁸ In 1515, Ibrahim even led his armies south down to the border between Tibet and Sichuan and encroached over the local Tibetan population. See MSL-Wuzong reign. Vol. 132 (1515): 2619.

³⁹ MSL-Wuzong reign. Vol. 126 (1515): 2529. The official in Sichuan memorialized the emperor that Ibrahim attacked the Tibetans and instigated them to defect the Ming.

aggression to the Ming's Tibet-Gansu border.⁴⁰ Batü Möngke's grandson Altan Khan led at least six expeditions in the northwest to occupy the land traditionally inhabited by Oirats and Tibetans.

In other words, the internal power competition generated momentum for the Mongols' western expansion. The defeated Mongol chieftains fled to the west. They seized the Tibetans' trading opportunities for survival and were chased by other Mongols. These activities damaged the tea-horse markets. Tibetan horse suppliers were enslaved by the Mongols and provided both tributes in kind and corvée labors to their new lords.⁴¹ Some Tibetans fled from their native place and gave up the pastoral life necessary to raise horses.⁴² Mongols seized the Tibetan certificates and acted as the horse suppliers themselves. The Ming court was aware of the disorder. It had to frequently suspend the markets in Gansu because the state could not afford to divert labor forces from military preparation to tea transportation.⁴³ It even decided not to recuperate the tea-horse quota system destroyed by the Mongols.⁴⁴ The westward aggression of Mongols therefore caused massive turbulence among the Tibetan horse providers.

UNSETTLING HORSE MARKETS IN THE NORTHEAST

The northeastern tribes were not major horse providers, but as affiliates of the Ming, their stable relations with the Ming were vital to Ming security. In the second stage, we did not see a dramatic drop of horse importation from the northeastern tribes, because the overall amount of horses from the tribes remained small compared to others. But we did see in the documents frequent discussions on shutting off/reopening the northeastern horse markets, which suggest that trade was unstable.

The Mongol expansion in the northeast was a paramount cause of the unsettling of northeastern markets. In fact, the Mongol penetration in the region began even earlier than in the northwest. We found three major waves of Mongolian eastward movement.

⁴⁰ A later record confirms that Batü Möngke killed Ibrahim and took control of his people. His forces moved into the Gansu border in the early Zhengde Reign (1506–1521). MSL-Shizong reign. Vol. 54 (1525): 1336.

⁴¹ MSL-Muzong reign. Vol. 18 (1568): 507.

⁴² See Li, 2008, p. 226.

⁴³ MSL-Yingzong reign. Vol. 27 (1437): 548 records that the military commander in Xining requested labor power to transport tea from Sichuan. The court explained the insufficiency of labor power because it was fully employed for military logistics.

⁴⁴ MSL-Shizong reign. Vol. 369 (1551): 6604.

The first wave was led by the Tartar Mongols. The Yongle Emperor's expedition against Arughtai in 1410 forced the Tartar Mongols to advance into the territory of the Uriyangqad commandaries. The Tartar Mongols not only attacked the Uriyangqad, but also colluded with them to violate the Ming border garrisons.⁴⁵ They also attacked the Jurchens.⁴⁶ The second wave was launched by the Oirats, who repeated the pattern. After they vanquished Arughtai's forces in 1435, the Oirats intermittently colluded with the Uriyangqad to plunder the Ming border and the Jurchens.⁴⁷ They attacked the Uriyangqad too when they became disobedient and began leaning toward the Ming.⁴⁸ The Ming court urged the Jurchens to fight the invading Mongol armies and defend the Ming border.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Oirats also made secret deals with the Jurchen chieftains.⁵⁰ Moreover, as did the Tartar Mongols, the Oirat leaders intermarried with the chieftains of the Uriyangqad commanderies to strengthen their loyalty.⁵¹ The Mongol infiltration continued after Esen's death in 1455, which signified the decline of the Oirats. Although the sources regarding the third wave of Mongol aggression after Esen's death were less abundant, they were not scant.⁵² Overall, we see that the Mongol penetration was deep, which was consequential to Ming's relations with the north-eastern tribes.

Mongol penetration drastically unsettled the horse markets in the northeast. The wars with the Mongols oftentimes shattered these markets. Concerned about security, the Ming government sometimes closed the markets, so as to cut off unwanted contact between Mongols and the northeastern tribes. Cessation of markets, however, was not an ideal choice, because it ran the risk of creating greater solidarity between the Mongols and the northeastern tribes, as they were all excluded from trade.

⁴⁵ There are a few records in MSL of the Uriyangqad attacking the Ming border in 1411, 1412, 1415, 1417, 1421, 1425, 1430, 1432, and 1433. The record in 1415 states clearly that Arughtai enlisted the three commandaries of Uriyangqad to balance the power of his competitor, the Oirats.

⁴⁶ We find a few entries. For example, entries in the MSL-Taizong reign-1424, and entries in the MSL-Xuanzong reign-1433.

⁴⁷ See the entries in the MSL-Yingzong reign-1437, 1439, 1442.

⁴⁸ See the entries in the MSL-Yingzong reign-1446, 1447, MSL-Daizong reign-1451.

⁴⁹ See the entries in the MSL-Yingzong reign for the years 1446 (Zhengtong 11th), 1447 (Zhengtong 12th) and MSL-Daizong reign for the year 1451 (Jingtai 2nd).

⁵⁰ See the entries in the MSL-Yingzong reign-1437, 1442.

⁵¹ See the entries in the MSL-Yingzong reign-1438, 1441.

⁵² See the entries in the MSL-Yingzong reign-1459, 1462, 1464, MSL-Yingzong reign-1465, 1466, 1476, 1483.

Many sources discuss the Ming wavering between opening and closing the horse markets. For example, the Ming government suspended the markets in Guangning during the Zhengtong era (1436–1449) because of the concern of leaking military intelligence.⁵³ Yet, in 1478, the Uriyangqad Mongols, who suffered from the closing of Guangning markets, petitioned Liaodong Regional Commander (*zong bing guan dudu tongzhi*) Ou Xin to reopen the markets. They threatened the Ming that the northern Mongols pressured the Uriyangqad Mongols to defect the Ming.⁵⁴ Concerned about possible alliance between the Uriyangqad and northern Mongols, the Ming officials made the concessions to reopen the horse markets. The markets were later disrupted again. In 1483, the Censor on Tour in Liaodong (*xunfu Liaodong yushi*) Chen Yue sent in another petition to reopen the Guangning markets, stating that the Uriyangqad Mongols, deprived of the opportunity to trade horses in Guangning, approached the markets reserved for Jurchens in Kaiyuan. It was seen as a malicious movement, because it would draw the Uriyangqad Mongols more than ever into the power orbit of Haixi Jurchens. The Jurchens would acquire powerful Mongol allies to attack Ming fortresses in Liaodong.⁵⁵ Under such pressure, the Ming's trust in the affiliated tribes continued to diminish. The northeastern horse markets became irregular in this period.

FLUCTUATING TRADE WITH THE MONGOLS

As the Ming horse trade with all these parties declined, its trade with Mongols nonetheless increased before it dropped again in the late fifteenth century. How does one explain the fact that Mongols, the war enemies, became the major supplier of military resources needed by the Ming? In the beginning, the Ming court objected to Mongols being a tribute, on both cultural and practical grounds. Yet, as we already discussed, its attitude toward the Mongols changed after 1410 when Mongols were no longer dispersed enemies but united under two major chieftains. This was the point when the Ming court realized “divide” was a more useful strategy than cessation of contact in dealing with the Mongols.

Thus, in 1410, the Yongle Emperor granted a princely title to Arughtai after defeating him and forcing him to move eastward. The

⁵³ MSL-Xianzong reign. Vol. 158 (1476): 2885–2886.

⁵⁴ MSL-Xianzong reign. Vol. 176 (1478): 3183–3184.

⁵⁵ MSL-Xianzong reign. Vol. 176 (1483): 3184.

title officially confirmed Arughtai's subordination and his tributary right.⁵⁶ To curtail the power of Arughtai, the Ming court also granted princely titles to three chieftains of Oirats, including Mahmud in 1409, and supported their tribute missions. However, establishing tributary relations did not guarantee peace. After the defeat of Arughtai, the Oirats became disobedient. In 1414, the Yongle Emperor launched another campaign to defeat the Oirats. A temporary diminishing of the Oirats quickly led to the restoration of Arughtai. In 1422, 1423, and 1424, the Yongle Emperor led several expeditions to defeat Arughtai and forced him to move toward the northeast. In fact, war did not terminate between 1409 and 1455 (the year of the death of Oirat leader Esen, which precluded a reshuffling of Mongol power), even though trade with Mongols kept ongoing.

So, unlike with other parties, the tribute trade with Mongols did not yield long-term peace, but rather at times provided a temporary cessation of hostilities. The Ming used tribute trade to divide the Mongols and to forestall the formation of a unified Mongol kingdom. The Ming indeed acquired thousands of horses from the Mongols, but the court was cautious not to deepen the trade contact with the Mongols. It resolutely refused to found horse markets for the Mongols, unlike what they did for the affiliated tribal trade partners.⁵⁷

The divide and rule policy worked well when Mongols were led by strong leaders. When capable leaders died, Mongols were again trapped in internecine warfare, which had an adverse impact on its horse trade with the Ming. Esen's death in 1455 led to a civil war. Between 1455 and 1465, Bo-lai, a chieftain based in eastern Mongolia organized tribute missions to the Ming. In this decade, as we see in [Appendix 2](#), there is still a stable flow of horses from Mongolia into China. After 1465 when Bo-lai died, we see the name of *xiao wangzi* (little prince), who led a mission carrying 4930 horses to the Ming in 1488. The little prince here refers to Batu Möngke, who was the descendant of the royal family and assumed the title of Dayan Khan. Batu Möngke was ambitious to unify Mongolia, and his entire career was absorbed by wars

⁵⁶ For the details, see [Wada \(1959\)](#) 1984, p. 189.

⁵⁷ For example, in Xuande 7th year (1432), Wei Yuan then the minister of Punishment, was persuaded by the Oirats' petition for horse markets. Yet, his suggestion to duplicate the markets of Liaodong in Mongolia was firmly rejected by the emperor. See MSL-Xuanzong reign. Vol. 90 (1432): 2056. Although a horse market was established in Datong in 1438 to host the Oirat embassies, it lasted only till 1449, when Esen, an Oirat chieftain, captured the Ming emperor who ventured an expedition in Mongolia. See MSL-Xuanzong reign. Vol. 90 (1432): 2056. MSL-Yingzong reign. Vol. 41 (1438): 812.

with the Oirats. Therefore between 1488 and 1551, tribute contact between Mongols and Ming ceased for more than 60 years.

Political instability largely explains the fluctuation in the trade with the Mongols. When the Mongols were temporarily unified under powerful leaders, the Ming court found it convenient to conduct trade with them and use trade as leverage to partially control them. But when the Mongols were trapped in anarchy, trade contact with the Ming also thinned out. It was also a difficult time for the Ming, who suffered from frequent Mongol attacks but lacked effective means to deal with them. The internal order/disorder of the Mongols therefore greatly determined the chances of their trade with the Ming.

CONCLUSION

We have examined the tributary horse trade between the Ming and its northern neighbors. Our focus on the nomadic and semi-nomadic tributary parties makes an important contribution. Scholars (Fletcher, 1968; Mancall, 1968) point out that there were significant divides in tributary practices: it operated on cultural sharing with some Sinicized neighbors (Korea and Vietnam); it invested more economic interests in relations with some partners (e.g., southeastern and Central Asian states); as for trade with nomads, there are few discussions. Our study fills in the lacuna by elucidating Ming's relations with the tribute partners in the northern landmass. The nomadic tribute partners shared few of the Ming Confucian doctrines. Their relations with the Ming coalesced through trade and diplomacy but were frequently interrupted by wars, which further underscored more dynamic changes in their relations than Ming relations with other tributary relations.

Our study shows that cultural norms only partially explain the rationales behind some of Ming's tribute policies. The cultural norms include both Confucian doctrines of the distinction of Chinese and barbarians (*huayi zhi bei*), and broadly the tactics habitually used by imperial dynasties to deal with non-Chinese. The Confucian doctrine pinpoints an image of China-centered civilizational superiority, according to which the peripheral peoples were ranged in an order according to the degree of their cultivation. It justified Ming's close relationship with Korea and perhaps even with Tibetans in the beginning. It partially explains the initial exclusion of Mongols from the tributary partners and the strategy employed by the Ming in the first stage: using affiliated tribal partners to buffer and contain the *real enemies*, that is, the Mongols.

Yet, there was ample opportunity for the Ming to push aside the cultural codes and face real demands. The decline of imperial ambition of China after the Yongle Emperor, the rapid reshuffling nomadic leadership, the political turmoil spreading from Central Asian regimes, all threatened to upset the tributary relations binding the Ming with its northern neighbors. Instead of being constrained by cultural norms, the Ming policy makers made pragmatic moves.⁵⁸ They used trade to divide the Mongols rather than denying any trade contact with them. However, they had to abandon the Tibetan horse markets and shut down the northeastern markets when necessary. Cultural norms are insufficient to account for these rapid transformations resulting from unexpected events untying and remaking the power balance.

Moreover, our study elaborates a new theory of tributary practices. The Ming rulers differentiated the tributary ties and used them strategically for different purposes. They kept a holistic view of the tribute relations, which guided their policies of opening/shutting trade with particular parties. They were most cautious about the interconnections among and, even more important, the merging of the tribute parties. In reality, however, they were unable to prevent links and coalitions between the tributary parties based on their geographical proximity and mutual interests. Therefore, many local actions, for example by the Mongols, did not just affect themselves, but produced far-reaching impacts affecting the Tibetans and the northeastern tribes. The tribute trade thus was not a designed system, but a functioning whole with all these interconnections.

In tributary trade, economic interests, political domination, and cultural sharing all played out at different levels. Seen from the Ming ruler's point of view, horse trade satisfied China's needs for cheap horses, nominally affirming its political domination and perhaps the superiority of Chinese culture. Yet, these views were not commonly shared by the tribute parties. Seen from the Mongols' view, horse trade brought in daily life goods unavailable in their own societies. The Central Asians viewed horse trade as a lucrative enterprise for expanding trading connections with China, but objected to the implication of political subordination. Korea probably saw tribute trade

⁵⁸ The limitation of culturalist explanations is revealed by some historical sociologists, based on other empirical stories. Patrimonial ideals once contributed to the rise of the Dutch state and its overseas expansion ended in constraining Dutch's further development, especially in the competition with England, in the eighteenth century (Adams, 1999; Erikson, 2014, chapter 4). The initial rise of the Florentine city-state drew heavily on patrimonialism but later found it the heel of Achilles of his consequent growth (McLean, 2005).

as a sign of a close relationship with China. The affiliated tribal partners, including the Jurchens, Uriyangqad, and Tibetans, received lavish gifts and profits from the horse trade. Their chieftains were provided titles as Ming officials, which greatly enhanced their authority among their own people. We therefore can hardly generalize the tribute relations as a trade system, a political system, or a cultural system. It is more beneficial to analyze when, under what conditions, and with whom the tribute relations appeared to be more driven by economic, political and cultural interests. This is also a future direction paved by our study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abu-Lughod, Janet L. 1989. *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Adams, Julia. 1999. “Culture in Rational-Choice Theories of State Formation.” In *State/Culture: State Formation After the Cultural Turn*, edited by George Steinmetz, pp. 98–122. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Amin, Samir. 1976. *Unequal Development*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Anderson, Perry. 1974. *Lineages of the Absolutist State*. London: Verso.
- Barfield, Thomas J. (1989) 1992. *The Perilous Frontier: Nomadic Empires and China, 221 BC to AD 1757*. Cambridge, Mass. and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Burton, Audrey. 1993. *Bukharan Trade 1558–1718*. Bloomington: Indiana University Institute for Inner Asian Studies, Papers on Inner Asia No. 23.
- Cha, Hyewon. 2011. “Was Joseon a Model or an Exception? Reconsidering the Tributary Relations during Ming China?” *Korea Journal* 51 (4): 33–58.
- Chen Zilong et al., 1962. *Ming Jingshi Wenbian* (MJSWB). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
- Dikötter, Frank. 1992. *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Erikson, Emily. 2014. *Between Monopoly and Free Trade: The English East India Company, 1600–1757*. Vol. 1. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fairbank, John K. 1968. *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Fletcher, Joseph. 1968. “China and Central Asia, 1368–1884.” In *Chinese World Order: Traditional China’s Foreign Relations*, edited by John Fairbank, pp. 206–224. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Frank, Andre Gunder. 1998. *ReORIENT: Global Economy in the Asian Age*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fuma, Susumu. 2007. “Chūgoku kinsei no taigai kankei” (China’s International Relations in Modern Period). In *Higashi ajia kinsei kindaiishi kenkyū*, edited by Yoshida Mitsuo, pp. 97–117. Tokyo: Hōsō daigaku kyōiku shinkōhaipp.
- Ge, Zhaoguang. 2014. *Zhai zi zhongguo* (Living in China: Reconstruction of Narratives on China). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.

- Hamashita, Takeshi. 2008. *China, East Asia and the Global Economy: Regional and Historical Perspectives*, edited by Linda Grove and Mark Selden. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hevia, James. 2009. "The Ultimate Gesture of Deference and Debasement': Kowtowing in China." In *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives*, edited by Michael J. Braddick, pp. 212–234. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hou, Renzhi. 1938. "Mindai xuan da shanxi sanzhen mashi kao" (Horse Trade in Three Garrison Towns—Xuanfu, Datong and Shanxi in Ming Dynasty). *Yanjing xuebao* 23.
- Kang, David C. 2010. *East Asia before the West: Five Centuries of Trade and Tribute*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lattimore, Owen. 1940. *The Inner Asian Frontier of China*. New York: American Geographical Society.
- Li, Wenjun. 2008. *Mingdai xihai menggu shi yanjiu* (History of Xihai Mongols in the Ming). Beijing: Zhongyang minzu daxue chuban she.
- Long, Wu. 2013. "Mingmo liaodong mashi maoyizhan he nuzhen zhubu xingshuai" (Horse Trade Competition along the Liaodong Frontier and the Development of Jurchen Tribes in the late Ming Dynasty). *Master's thesis*. Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.
- Nakajima, Gakusho. 2018. "The Structure and Transformation of the Ming Tribute Trade System." In *Global History and New Polycentric Approaches: Europe, Asia and the Americas in a World Network System*, edited by Manuel Perez Garcia and Lucio De Sousa. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mancall, Mark. 1968. "The Ch'ing Tribute System: An Interpretive Essay." In *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, edited by John Fairbank, pp. 63–89. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Marx, Karl. (1857–1858) 1964. *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, translated by Jack Cohen. New York: International Publishers.
- McLean, Paul D. 2005. "Patronage, Citizenship, and the Stalled Emergence of the Modern State in Renaissance Florence." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47 (3): 638–664.
- Migdal, Joel. 2001. *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Ming Shi Lu (MSL). (1955) 1966. *Ming Dynasty*. Beijing: National Beijing Library.
- Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. *Colonising Egypt*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Mote, Frederick W. and Denis Twitchett (eds). 1998. *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 7: The Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644, Part 1*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Perdue, Peter. 2015. "The Tenacious Tributary System," *Journal of Contemporary China* 24 (96): 1002–1014.
- Richard, John F. 1983. "Outflows of Precious Metals from Early Islamic India." In *Precious Metals in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Worlds*, edited by John F. Richards, pp. 183–205. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- Robinson, David M. 2013. *Martial Spectacles of the Ming Court*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rossabi, Morris. 1970. "The Tea and Horse Trade with Inner Asia during the Ming." *Journal of Asia History* 4 (2): 136–168.

- . 1972. "Ming China and Turfan, 1406–1517." *Central Asiatic Journal* 16 (3): 206–225.
- . 1990. "The 'Decline' of the Central Asian Caravan Trade." In *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World 1350–1750*, edited by James D. Tracy, pp. 351–370. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1997. "Ming Foreign Policy: The Case of Hami." In *China and Her Neighbors: Borders, Visions of the Other, Foreign Policy 10th–19th Century*, edited by Sabine Dabringhaus and Roderich Ptak, pp. 79–97. Wiesbaden: Harrassaowitz Verlag.
- Serruys, Henry. 1967. *Sino-Mongol Relations during the Ming, II. The Tribute System and the Diplomatic Missions (1400–1600)*. Bruxelles: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises.
- Sperling, Elliot. 1981. "Did the Early Ming Emperors Attempt to Implement a 'Divide and Rule' Policy in Tibet." In *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History, and Culture*, edited by Ernst Steinkellner and Helmut Tauscher, pp. 339–356. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Te-mu-le. 2007. "Shiliu shiji duoyawei yu mingchao guanxi yinlun" (About the relationship between the Duoyan Guard and the Ming Dynasty). In *Yuanshi ji minzu yu bianjiang yanjiu jikan* (Yuan Dynasty and Ethnicity and Frontier) 1: 88–99.
- Wada, Sei. (1959) 1984. *Mingdai menggu shilun ji* (Essays on the History of Mongolia in the Ming Dynasty). Vol. 2, translated by Shixian Pan. Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan. Originally published as Tōashi kenkyū—Mōko hen (Study on the History of Far East—Mongolia).
- Wade, Geoff. 2008. "Engaging the South: Ming China and Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century." *Journal of the Economic & Social History of the Orient* 51 (4): 578–638.
- Waldron, Arthur. 2005. "Sino-centric World Order in Asia a Discredited Theory." *Financial Times*, August 24, 10.
- Wang, Gungwu. 1968. "Early Ming Relations with Southeast Asia: A Background Essay." In *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, edited by John Fairbank, pp. 34–62. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wang, Mingke. 2009. *Yingxiong zuxian yu xiongdi minzi* (The Heroic Ancestors and the Brotherly Tribes). Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
- Wang, Yuan-kang. 2011. *Harmony and War: Confucian Culture and Chinese Power Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Watanabe, Hiroshi. 1975. "An Index of Embassies and Tribute Missions from Islamic Countries to Ming China (1368–1644) as Recorded in the Ming Shih-Lu Classified According to Geographic Area." *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* 33: 285–348.
- Weber, Max. (1922) 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weber, Max. (1923) 2003. *General Economic History*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- Wilson, Nicholas Hoover. 2011. "From Reflection to Refraction: State Administration in British India, circa 1770–1855." *American Journal of Sociology* 116 (5): 1437–1477.

- Yang, Bin. 2004. "Horses, Silver, and Cowries: Yunnan in Global Perspective." *Journal of World History* 15 (3): 281–322.
- Yang, Yiqing. 2001. *Yang yiqing ji* (The Collected Works of Yang Yiqing). Vol. 1. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju.
- Zhang, Binglin. 2014. "Xu zhongxing" (Preface to an Essay on Race and Clan). In *Zhang Taiyan Quan Ji* (The Complete Works of Zhang Taiyan). Vol. 3, pp. 362–363. Shanghai: Shanghai ren min chu ban she.
- Zhang Tingyu et al. 1980. *Ming Shi* (Wuying Dian edition) (MS), edited by Jialuo Yang. Taipei: Dingwen shuju.
- Zhao, Xianhai. 2012. *Mingdai jiubian changcheng junzhen shi* (History of Nine Great Wall Garrisons in the Ming Dynasty). Beijing: Shehui kexu wenxian chubanshe.

Liping Wang is associate professor of the Graduate School of Education at Peking University. She got her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Chicago in 2013. Before joining PKU, she had taught at the University of Hong Kong and Haverford College. Her specialized fields are comparative historical sociology, ethnic studies, theory, and knowledge production (lipingw@pku.edu.cn).

Geng Tian is associate professor of sociology at Peking University. He graduated from the University of Chicago in 2015 with Ph.D. in sociology. Since 2015 he has been teaching in Peking University. Tian is a historical sociologist with research interests in social theory, political sociology, and state/empire formation (gengtian@pku.edu.cn).

Appendix I: Horse Trade in the First Stage (1368–1424)

Year	Tribute Partners	Number of Horses (pi)
Tribute Missions		
Korea (the Kingdom of Koryŏ was succeeded by Chosŏn dynasty after 1392)		
1372	Korea	17
1373	Korea	50
1377	Korea	60
1378	Korea	60
1384	Korea	2,000
1385	Korea	5,000
1386	Korea	3,040/5,000 ⁵⁹
1387	Korea	16
1390	Korea	48
1392	Korea	10,000 ⁶⁰
1394	Korea	9,880 ⁶¹
1394	Korea	14
1401	Korea	10,000 ⁶²
1402	Korea	2,600 ⁶³
1403	Korea	1,000 ⁶⁴
1406	Korea	36
1407	Korea	3,000
1414	Korea	20
1418	Korea	40
1421	Korea	10,000
1423	Korea	30
1423	Korea	20,000

(Continued)

⁵⁹ Statistics provided by [Serruys \(1967\)](#) but it cannot be found and verified in our search in MSL.

⁶⁰ The tribute was carried out upon request from the Ming Court.

⁶¹ Statistics provided by [Serruys \(1967\)](#) but it cannot be found and verified in our search in MSL.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

(Continued)

Year	Tribute Partners	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
Central Asia		
1387	Samarkand	15
1388	Samarkand	300
1389	Samarkand	205
1390	Samarkand	670 ⁶⁵
1392	Samarkand	84
1394	Samarkand	200
1396	Samarkand	212
1397	Samarkand	240
1397	Samarkand	1,095
1402	Muslim merchants	160
1403	Hami	190
1403	Hami	4,740
1406	Hami	35
1408	Muslim merchants	300–500
1416	Hami/Turfan ⁶⁶	170
1416	Hami	300
1419	Hami	3,546
1421	Hami	1,000
1422	Hami/Turfan ⁶⁷	1,300
1423	Hami	1,000
Northeastern Tribes		
1403	Jurchen	13
1406	Uriyangqad-Fuyu	70
1406	Uriyangqad-Fuyu	70
1419	Uriyangqad-Taining	1,000
Mongols		
1411	Tartar—Arughtai	1,000
1412	Tartar—Arughtai	200
1415	Oirats	50
1415	Tartar—Arughtai	75

(Continued)

⁶⁵ The tribute was brought by private merchants to the Ming.

⁶⁶ Rossabi (1972) suggested the horses were tributes from Turfan.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

(Continued)

Year	Tribute Partners	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
1418	Tartar—Arughtai	70
1420	Tartar—Arughtai	900
Horse Markets		
Northeastern Tribes		
1424	Kaiyuan	200 Cost: unknown
Tibetans		
1377	Qinzhou-Hezhou	171 Cost: unknown
1380	Qinzhou-Hezhou	1,691 Cost: unknown
1380	Qinzhou-Hezhou	2,050 Cost: 58,892 <i>jin</i> tea and 98 cows
1382	Qinzhou-Hezhou	181 Cost: unknown
1382	Taozhou	135 Cost: unknown
1383	Qinzhou-Hezhou-Taozhou- Qingyuan	585 Cost: unknown
1386	Qinzhou-Hezhou and Xunan- Guizhouwusa -Ningchuan-Bijie	6,729 Cost: unknown
1387	Shaanxi	2,807 Cost: unknown
1390	Xining-Minzhou-Hezhou	7,060 Cost: cash 600,000 <i>ding</i>
1392	Hezhou	10,340 Cost: ~300,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1395	Yazhou-Diaomen and Qinzhou- Hezhou	~240 Cost: unknown
1397	Transaction with Tibetans ⁶⁸	1,560 Cost: ~99,000 <i>pi</i> textiles
1399	Hezhou-Xinin-Taozhou	13,518 Cost: ~500,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1410	Hezhou	7,714 Cost: 278,640 <i>jin</i> tea

⁶⁸ Insufficient information on the location of the market.

Appendix 2: Horse Trade in the Second Stage (1425–1550)

Year	Tribute Partners	Number of Horses (pi)
Tribute Missions		
Korea		
1427	Korea	5,000
1450	Korea	1,477
1530	Korea	5
Central Asia		
1447	Hami	63
1460	Hami	9
1465	Hami	20
1465	Hami	200
Northeastern Tribes		
1443	Uriyangqad-Taining	600
1470	Jurchen	700 (including mules)
1515	Uriyangqad-Duoyan	10/1,000 ⁶⁹
1521	Uriyangqad-Taining	100
Mongols		
1428	Tartar—Arughtai	460
1430	Tartar—Arughtai	1,280
1438	Oirat—Toghon	1,583
1439	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	3,725
1440	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	1,647
1440	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	90
1442	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	2,537
1444	Oirat—Toghto Bukha and Oirat—Esen	3,092
1445	Oirat	800
1447	Oirat	4,172
1447	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	63
1448	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	124
1450	Oirat—Esen	4,400 (including camels)

(Continued)

⁶⁹ Two different versions of record found in the MSL database. In the database, the record appeared to be 10 (十), while in the two major editions in Qing Dynasty—*Baoben* (a version stored in *baojinglou* sutra depository) and *Guangben* (a copy written in Guangdong dialect)—it was shown to be 1000 (千).

(Continued)

Year	Tribute Partners	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
1451	Oirat	329
1451	Oirat	3,363
1452	Northern Bo-lai	~40,000 (including camels)
1462	Northern Bo-lai	129
1463	Northern Bo-lai	3,000
1471	Northern Beg-arслан and the T'AI-TZU Bol(qu)	430
1472	Northern Bo-lai	85
1488	Little King	4,930 (including mules)
Horse Markets Northeastern Tribes		
1425	Guangning	82 Cost: unknown
1425	Guangning	465 Cost: unknown
1514	Shandong-Liaodong- Henan-Lufeng-Baoding	15,000 Cost: 225,000 taels
Tibetans		
1432	Hezhou	~7,700
1432	Hezhou	3,296
1435	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	~13,000 Cost: ~1,097,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1435	Shaanxi	~1,600 Cost: ~1,600 cows and ~48,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1444	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	14,050 Cost: unknown
1447	Xining-Handong-Anding- Aduan-Quxian	2,946 Cost: 125,430 <i>jin</i> tea
1450	Hezhou	1,400 Cost: paid in huai salt
1461	Shaanxi	2,000 Cost: ~70,000 taels
1472	Shaanxi	278 Cost: 5,500 taels
1490	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	4,000 Cost: ~400,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1508	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	~9,000 Cost: ~782,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1543	Ningxia	2,000 Cost: 26,000 taels