

The Struggle for Status: A New Exploration of the Reasons for the "Luchuan Problem" in the Ming Dynasty

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Abstract: The fundamental contradiction between the central government and the Luchuan Si's clan in the early Ming Dynasty was about the political nature of the latter. The Luchuan Si's clan strived to gain political status as a vassal state, constantly encroaching on the land under the jurisdiction of the surrounding chieftains and expanding outward. Tribute became a means of political mediation and accumulation of power with the Ming Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty, on the other hand, made efforts to maintain the current status of the Luchuan Si's clan as a local official, hoping to achieve the goal of maintaining order in the southwestern border area through tribute activities and military actions. During the Hongwu period, the political ambitions of the Si's clan were suppressed by the Ming Dynasty, so the Si's clan remained dormant and accumulated strength during the Yongle period. During the Xuande period, their power was restored; but during the Zhengtong period, the Si's family accumulated enough strength to break the balance and launch a large-scale outward expansion war, which became the trigger for the "Three Expeditions on the Luchuan". In summary, it can be seen that the Zhengtong "Three Expeditions on the Lushan" is undoubtedly a just battle to defend national integrity and counter separatism.

1. Introduction

The Luchuan issue in the early Ming Dynasty and the subsequent "Three Expeditions of Luchuan" during the Zhengtong period, had a profound impact on the governance of the southwestern border region and even the entire political situation of the Ming Dynasty. Regarding this issue, the academic community mainly focuses on the rise of the Si's clan in the Yuan Dynasty, the situation in the Luchuan region before the Ming Zhengtong period, the "Three Expeditions of Luchuan" during the Ming Zhengtong period, the residual activities of the Si's clan after the "Three Expeditions of Luchuan", and the changes in the southwestern border region. However, there seems to be room for further discussion on the reasons for the military confrontation between the Ming Dynasty and the Luchuan Si's clan [1]. From the historical records of the Zhengtong period, it can

be seen that the "Three Expeditions on the Luchuan" were the result of the frequent external expansion wars launched by the Si and their refusal to accept the pacification of the Ming Dynasty; However, later scholars often believed that the eunuch Wang Zhen's disorderly governance was an important reason for it; [2]Luo Yong pointed out that "the governance measures taken during the Yongle and Xuande periods on the southwestern border, especially the western Yunnan border, became an important factor in the formation of the Luchuan problem during the Zhengtong period. [3]We believes that whether it is the frequent external expansion wars launched by Luchuan, the encouragement of Emperor Yingzong of Ming to send troops by Wang Zhen, or the improper formulation of southwest border policies during the Yongle and Xuande periods, all are symptoms of the conflict between the Ming Dynasty and Luchuan. If further questioning, why did the Luchuan Si's clan continue to launch external expansion wars, and what is its core purpose? This may be closely related to Si Shi's pursuit of higher political status.

There has been discussion in the academic community about the nature of the Luchuan Si's regime, but the views are not consistent. You Zhong once pointed out that in the early Ming Dynasty, the Luchuan had a great potential to separate from the Ming Dynasty and establish the Luchuan Dai Kingdom alone. [4]Bi Aonan believed that Lukawa had already broken free from Yuan Dynasty control by the end of the Yuan Dynasty and became a dominant kingdom; [5]Lu Ren believed that the Yuan Dynasty did not give up control of the Luchuan region, so the Luchuan Si's clan always belonged to the jurisdiction of Yunnan Province, not an independent kingdom, nor was it under the jurisdiction of Myanmar. [6]So, was the Luchuan Si's regime a vassal state or a local official under the central government during the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties? We believes that the dispute over the status of the Si's clan regime was precisely the contradiction point of the Luchuan issue in the early Ming Dynasty, and it was also the fundamental reason for the occurrence of the "Three Expeditions of Luchuan". This article intends to start from the issue of Luchuan's search for political status as a vassal state in the early Ming Dynasty, and to sort out various attempts by Luchuan to seek higher political status during the periods from Hongwu to Zhengtong, as well as the response of the Ming Dynasty. The aim is to provide a new perspective for the academic community to re-examine the Zhengtong "Three Expeditions of Luchuan", and to try and summarize the border morphology and characteristics of the Ming Dynasty.

2. Four Points of Evidence for the Luchuan Si's Clan Seeking the Status of a Clan State

The first issue that needs to be addressed at the beginning of this article is to prove that the Si's clan was seeking political status as a vassal state during the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties. Overall, based on relevant records and academic research results, we believe that the evidence mainly includes the following four points.

Firstly, at the end of the Yuan Dynasty, the leaders of the Luchuan began to claim the title of king and indicated it through titles such as "fa". In Dai language, there are records of "fa" or "fa" referring to "heaven". For example, "Da Bo Yi" referred to heaven as the law, and "fa" was used as the upper voice. [7]Therefore, their chieftains all added the word "fa", such as "Si Renfa" and "Si Jifa". "There are also records of" king ", such as" Si Ren... claiming to be called "fa". fa, the name of the Yi king. "[8]Mr. Fang Guoyu once studied the title of the Luchuan Si family and pointed out that after the end of the Yuan Dynasty, he began to add" fa ", The "Luchuan Si Genealogy"records that "Han Jing Fa is the title of later generations". [9]Regardless of whether "fa" means "heaven" or "king", the Si's clan has a suspicion of arrogance. [10]Therefore, "if they have an appeal, they dare not add the word "fa"; China does not use the word" fa ". From this, it can be seen that the Si's clan is quite afraid of the Ming government and has not yet launched its ambition to seek political status as a vassal state. As for the reasons for adding "fa" after the thought theory recorded in official

materials such as the "Ming Shi Lu", we have not yet found strong explanatory materials. However, I speculate that perhaps at that time, the rulers and ministers of the Ming Dynasty did not know what "fa" meant, and it was only a customary regional term. In fact, in addition to the title, the act of usurping the throne by the Si family also had other behaviors. According to the "Biography of the Baiyi", "Although he was appointed to Zhengshuo and paid tribute, the system of taking the throne was imitated by the king." [11]The system of taking the throne was also imitated by the king, and the Si family clearly did not want to be a vassal.

Secondly, in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties, the local government of the Luchuan Si's clan had established a unique and complete system of official positions and political systems with local characteristics. After the rise of the Si's clan in the late Yuan Dynasty, its operations in the Luchuan region have never ceased, and the establishment of a strict governance system is an important manifestation. According to Qian Guxun, who was appointed as an envoy to the Luchuan region during the Hongwu period, It is referred to as Si Lunfa and Zhao, which is also known as the monarch in China. The land where it resides in Luchuan is called Lan, which is also known as the capital in China. It belongs to Daomeng as the president and concurrently leads the military and civilians. Zhaolu leads more than ten thousand people, Zhaopu leads more than a thousand people, Zhaobo leads more than a hundred people; the one who leads the army is called Zhaohasi, and the one who leads one is called Zhaozhun; all belong to Daomeng. There are also Zhaolu orders, and in case of conscription, they also lead the army with Daomeng. Although Si Lunfa was appointed by the Ming Dynasty as the Luchuan Ping Myanmar Propaganda and Consolation Department at this time[12], a military and political system with Si Lunfa as the core, which was different from the Ming Dynasty official system, had already formed within it during the Hongwu period. This strict military and political organization is fundamentally different from the internal organizations of other chieftains. For example, the "Zexi" system [13]within the chieftains in the northwest of Guizhou is the old organizational form in their area, while the Luchuan Si's clan's political structure is integrated on the basis of the old organization, with more obvious political subjectivity.

Thirdly, in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties, the Si family had established a regional tribute order centered around the Luchuan. According to the "Luchuan Si's clan Genealogy", "At that time, Si Kefa was forty-five years old. The Chinese and Burmese invaders were defeated and retreated, and neighboring small countries heard of it, leading them to submit and pay tribute. There were various tribes including Mseng hung, Jingxian, Jinglao, Quanmai, Quandong, Tseng hung, and Jing dong." At the end of the Yuan Dynasty, Si Kefa defeated the Yuan army and gained great fame. The tribes and small countries around Luchuan were attracted by Si's clan to submit and pay tribute. It is also recorded that "at that time, the Uen so li, Pang te tsa pang na hung, Pang te li pu, and Men li la kingdoms of India successively paid tribute." [14]Of course, this statement also states that China also paid tribute one after another, which is obviously an exaggeration. In fact, in August of the fifteenth year of the Zhizheng era, [15]Although the Yuan court defeated the army of Sikefa in this expedition, it was unable to completely eliminate its influence due to the decline of its national strength. Therefore, it adopted a policy of appeasement and established the Pingmian Xuanfu Division, with Sikefa as the envoy, to further expand its influence. Establishing a tribute system centered around oneself is by no means something that ordinary local officials can do, and it is obvious that the Si's clan is seeking a higher political status.

Fourthly, from the military activities of the Luchuan Si's clan in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties, it can be seen that their actual infiltration areas were not limited to the local officials' areas, but also directly invaded the areas directly managed by the Yuan and Ming dynasties. This essentially challenged the authority of the central dynasty and aimed to gain the political status of the vassal states. In the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties, the national situation was unstable, providing the possibility for the rise of Luchuan and the pursuit of higher political status. The most

direct manifestation of its rapid expansion of political ambition was its efforts to invade surrounding tribes. When introducing the situation of Luchuan in the beginning of the "Biography of the Baiyi", it was said: "The Baiyi are thousands of miles southwest of Yunnan, with a place of ten thousand miles. Jingdong is to the east, Xitiangula is to the west, 800 daughter-in-law is to the south, and Tufan is to the north. To the southeast is Cheli, to the southwest is Myanmar, to the northeast is Ailao, and to the northwest is Xifan and Huihe." [16] According to further research by Fang Guoyu, Its specific scope includes "outside of Luchuan Pingmian, there are Ganya, Nandian, Tengchong, Lujiang, and Mangshi to the west of Lujiang, as well as the land of Husa and Lasa. To the east of Lujiang and west of Lancang River, there are Mengding, Menglian, Dahou, Wandian, and Zhenkang. To the east of Lancang River, there are Weiyuan, Zhenyuan, and Zhele." After the expansion in the late Yuan Dynasty, During the Hongwu period, the actual jurisdiction of the Si's clan reached a scale of "tens of thousands of miles in local areas", many of which were also known as the chieftains under the central dynasty, and the control of the surrounding areas by Luchuan was clearly quite deep. During the Zhengtong period, when the political ambitions of the Si's clan further increased, their invasion was no longer limited to the Tusi areas such as "Nandian, Ganya, Tengchong, Lujiang, and Jinchi[17]", but also began to continuously encroach on the areas directly under the jurisdiction of the Ming Dynasty, "invading the border and killing and capturing soldiers and civilians". [18] From the above records, it is not difficult to find that the military activities of the Si's clan clearly underwent a continuous expansion process, first surrendering to the surrounding chieftains, and then invading areas directly under the jurisdiction of the Ming Dynasty, such as the Golden Tooth Guard. Upon closer examination, the reason for this still points to a higher political goal, which is to establish a regional political regime centered on the Lushan [19].

In summary, we have sufficient evidence to prove that in the early Ming Dynasty, the Si's clan attempted to establish a vassal state centered around the Luchuan region. However, some scholars believe that the military activities of the Si's clan during the Zhengtong period were only for the purpose of competing for territory and expanding the scope of their rule. They did not have the political ambition to dominate the central government, nor did they have the lofty ambition to claim independence from Yunnan. [20] We do not deny that the Si's clan did not have the ambition to dominate the central government, nor did they show any signs of separatism from Yunnan. However, it is entirely possible for them to claim sovereignty in the Luchuan Dai region. As Xie Xiaohui said, in ancient times, there were "multiple local monarchies with local scripts, etiquette systems, and political structures" in the southwestern ethnic minority areas. [21] Wen Chunlai referred to them as "the tradition of southwestern countries" or "the tradition of southwestern monarchy". During the Yuan and Ming dynasties, the former situation of numerous "countries" in the southwest region no longer existed, but this "national tradition" factor persisted. In some cases, the political ambitions of some tribal leaders to seek higher status often emerged, with the Luchuan Si's clan as a representative, attempting to transform the "national tradition" into reality. However, it still does not break away from the traditional framework of the "Chinese barbarian order". This has been the case since the Zhengtong period when both sides had already engaged in military warfare, but the Si family still sent people to the Beijing Dynasty to pay tribute to observe a few. Although Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty believed that the other party's motives were impure, it should not be ruled out that the Si family provided the possibility of maintaining the suzerain-vassal relationship after obtaining a higher political position.

3. Rethinking the Political Activities of Luchuan in the Early Ming Dynasty from the Perspective of Status Struggle

After listing several pieces of evidence that the Luchuan Si's clan sought the status of a vassal

state, we need to re-examine the various political activities of the Si's clan in the early Ming Dynasty, from the perspective of status disputes, analyze the behavioral logic behind them, and then discuss the border form of China in the Ming Dynasty.

(1) The setback of the political intentions of the Luchuan Si's clan during the Hongwu period

The rise of Luchuan was built on the foundation of the Yuan Dynasty's exploration of its territory for the purpose of conquering Myanmar. It established post stations, commissioned military supplies, stationed troops for defense, improved the transportation conditions of the area (Luchuan), broke the blockade, activated personnel and economic and cultural exchanges, and elevated the political, military, and economic status of the region. [22] By the early Ming Dynasty, the power of Luchuan was still strong, but at this time, the Ming Dynasty, which had just been established for more than ten years, was even more powerful. In September of the 14th year of the Hongwu reign, Emperor Taizu of the Ming Dynasty ordered Fu Youde, Lan Yu, Mu Ying, and others to lead their troops to "conquer the King of Liang in Yunnan", [23] stating that "Yunnan was not annexed, but also carried me as a messenger and accepted me to escape. The Ming army progressed smoothly, first pacifying Puding, and then attacking Qujing. "The barbarians of Dongchuan, Wumeng, and Mangbu were all looking forward to the wind and surrender. In the first month of the fifteenth year, Mu Ying and others first went to places such as Jianchang, Lin'an, Xundian, and Chuxiong, and then to Dali and Jinchi. Liang Wang was defeated and committed suicide, marking the end of the Yuan Dynasty's rule over Yunnan. Faced with the offensive of the Ming Dynasty army, the Si family felt great pressure. "From Cheli, Pingmyanmar, and other places, they led the surrender, and the barbarians knew that Pingmyanmar was peaceful." Therefore, the Ming Dynasty established the Pingmyanmar Propaganda and Comfort Department, and appointed the Tu Emirate Si Lunfa as the Propaganda and Comfort Envoy. [24] In August of the seventeenth year of the Hongwu reign, "the pacifist and pacifist envoy Si Lunfa sent a sword to order Meng to offer local items and affix the seal of the pacifist and pacifist envoy bestowed by the late Yuan Dynasty." [25] Ming Taizu "changed the pacifist and civilian pacifist envoy department to the pacifist and pacifist propaganda envoy department in Luchuan," and explained: "During the Yuan Dynasty, the border between Luchuan and pacifist and pacifist provinces was divided into two routes to command their headquarters. In the end, Si Lunfa sent envoys to pay tribute and was appointed to concurrently control the land of Luchuan, so it was changed. According to Bionan's research, during the aforementioned timeline period, Due to the improper management of officials in the Ming Dynasty, "local people rebelled and Jin Teeth allied with Luchuan to 'overthrow' Yongchang City." At the same time, it was pointed out that in the fifteenth year of the Hongwu reign, "Luchuan's' fear of hearing 'and' surrender 'were not credible. [26] In the 18th year of the Hongwu reign, which was not long after his return to the Ming Dynasty, "the pacification envoy Si Lunfa rebelled and led a Baiyi to invade Jingdong." [27] The local magistrate Otoben and the governor of Baiyachuan, Feng Cheng, led their troops to attack them. In the thick fog of the sky, they suddenly encountered barbarians, and our troops were defeated, resulting in the death of King Qianhu, Bai Yi Si Lun lured a group of barbarians to invade the Moshale Stronghold in Malongtarangdian, and Mu Ying, the Marquis of Xiping, sent the Commander Ning to break through it, beheading more than 1500 levels. "The return of Si Shi to the capital and his rebellion illustrate the complexity of the relationship between the two sides during this period, and three points need to be clarified:

Firstly, the Si family turned in the "Seal of the Propaganda and Comfort Bureau granted by the Yuan Dynasty" in exchange for the seal of the Ming Dynasty, as well as the establishment of the Propaganda and Comfort Bureau in Lukawa Pingmian, indicating that Lukawa Pingmian has at least formally been included in the management of the Ming Dynasty and is a minority autonomous regime under its rule. Whether it is the name of the Xuan Wei Si [28] or the actual strategy of the

Ming Dynasty[29], we cannot call Luchuan an independent or vassal kingdom. This is not related to the different understandings between the two parties regarding the establishment of the Xuan Wei Si.

Secondly, the Si's clan launched several expansionist wars, such as invading areas such as Jingdong and Moshalezhai in Malongtarangdian, with the main goal of confronting the Ming Dynasty's strategy in its surrounding areas and restoring the old rule. The fundamental reason was to strive for higher political status, but the Si's clan's military activities were firmly suppressed by the Ming Dynasty. In this context, the Ming Dynasty further strengthened its control over the Luchuan Ping Myanmar region by setting up Jingdong and Menghua guards[30], which could be described as a setback to the political intentions of the Si's clan.

Thirdly, after the plan to expand northward failed, the Si family shifted its direction to Myanmar. In the ninth month of the 28th year of the Hongwu reign, "King Bularang of Myanmar sent an envoy, Sangqilacha, to pay tribute to local goods. As a result, Bai Yi Si Lun repeatedly sent troops to invade their territory. [31]After learning about it, Emperor Taizu of Ming immediately sent envoys Li Sicong and Qian Guxun to Burma and the Baiyi in February of the following year. In the imperial edict sent to Si Lunfa, Emperor Taizu of the Ming Dynasty sternly reprimanded, "At the beginning of the foolishness of Er Luchuan, he was skilled in promoting the Battle of Golden Teeth, and then plotted against Jingdong. However, when he invaded Dingbian, he should have sent troops to seek revenge. I will release him without hesitation, and I have never tried to force him into a state of restraint. I have listened to his own voice and teachings. How many years have it been since? Recently, I heard that he was cannibalizing his neighbors with the intention of expanding their land, but he was skilled in having his own people." "Si Lunfa was afraid of the imperial edict, fell down to apologize, and was willing to withdraw his troops. [32]Based on this, it can be seen that the political intention of the Si's clan to expand south has once again been thwarted.

After repeated setbacks in the expansion war, the interior of Luchuan also split. In September of the 30th year of the Hongwu reign, the "Luchuan Ping Myanmar Propaganda Commissioner Si Dao Gan Meng rebelled and expelled his Propaganda Commissioner Si Lunfa". [33] After Si Lunfa went to the capital to seek help from the Ming Dynasty, and with the help of the Ming army, he was able to return Luchuan. He died over a year ago. [34]In summary, it can be seen that the political activities of the Si family during the Hongwu period were quite unfavorable.

(2) The dormancy and resurgence of the Luchuan Si's clan during the Yongle and Xuande periods

After Zhu Di seized the throne through the "Jingnan Battle", he did not relax his management of the Luchuan region and mainly adopted a policy of "multiple fiefs and public buildings". According to our statistics, there were at least five times during the Yongle period when chieftains were added or relocated in the Luchuan and surrounding areas to strengthen their control over the southwestern frontier. In the first month of the first year of Yongle, Ming Chengzu, due to the fact that "the land is vast and densely populated, it is advisable to establish a magistrate's office", therefore, in the land that was formerly under the jurisdiction of Luchuan, he established the five chief administrative offices of Le Dian, Da Hou, Qian Ya, Wan Dian, and Lu Jiang, under the jurisdiction of Yunnan Dushi. [35]In May of the second year of the Yongle reign, "Babaizhenai were appointed as the military and civilian propaganda and consolation envoys, and Babaizhenai were appointed as the propaganda and consolation envoys with the sword of the Tu Emirate. His younger brother, Dao Zhaosan, was appointed as the propaganda and consolation envoy of Babaizhenai in Dadian. He also sent envoys to the propaganda and consolation envoys of Luchuan ping, Myanmar, Laos, and other prefectures such as Mengding, Bole, and Weiyuan. [36]In April of the fourth year of the Yongle reign, for the convenience of management, the Ming Dynasty changed Meng Lian, who was previously under the jurisdiction of the Luchuan Plain Propaganda and

Comfort Department and later under the jurisdiction of the Meng Prefecture, to the Meng Lian Chief Office, and made it clear that he was under the jurisdiction of the Yunnan Metropolitan Department and ordered the dispatch of swords as the chief, with a crown, belt, and seal. [37]In April of the sixth year of the Yongle reign, the Ming Dynasty established two chief lawsuits, namely the Promotion of Wa and the Scattering of Jin, under the jurisdiction of the Yunnan Metropolitan Government. Both of these places were initially under the jurisdiction of the Luchuan Ping Myanmar Propaganda and Condolence Department. As for the arrival of the eighth class of the chieftain Zhu Dian, please do not establish a chief lawsuit. This was approved by Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty. [38]From the above records, it can be seen that on the one hand, the Ming Dynasty achieved regional balance through the "multiple fiefs and multiple constructions" approach, reducing the regional influence of the Si's clan. On the other hand, it included the new chieftains under the management of the provincial government in Yunnan during the Ming Dynasty, ultimately strengthening the Ming Dynasty's influence in the Luchuan region. In addition, in October of the second year of the Yongle reign, Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty appointed officials from various regions of Yunnan, who were not familiar with Chinese characters and were not familiar with ceremonies and styles when encountering memorials. He ordered officials to be appointed as leaders in each department, and those who were capable of writing and practicing were appointed as officials. Therefore, he established experience and capital positions at the six military and civilian propaganda and consolation offices in Luchuan, Pingmian, and Mubang. [39]The experiences and events were all designated by the Ming Dynasty, and while assisting local officials in communicating with the central government, they undoubtedly also played a role in monitoring the local areas. The above control over Luchuan was undoubtedly further advanced compared to the Hongwu Dynasty.

On the other hand, during the Hongwu period, the Si's clan launched several expansionist wars and was repeatedly attacked by the Ming Dynasty army, leading to internal divisions and a significant weakening of the power of Luchuan. In this context, during the Yongle period, the Si family chose the strategy of hiding their talents and nurturing their abilities, with timely tribute being the most representative. According to our statistics, during the 22nd year of Yongle, the Si family sent people to pay tribute 16 times, with an average of 0.8 times per year, far exceeding the Ming Dynasty's standard of one tribute every three years. Compared to other chieftains, they also did not fall behind. In some years, such as the fifth, ninth, and eleventh years of Yongle, there was even a phenomenon of two tribute per year. It can be seen that the Si family demonstrated great loyalty to the Ming Dynasty at least on the surface. In addition to actively sending people to pay tribute to their own bodies, the Si family also made every effort to demonstrate loyalty to the Ming Dynasty through additional actions in tribute. For example, in July of the ninth year of the Yongle reign, the "Luchuan Ping Myanmar Propaganda Commissioner Si Xingfa sent tribute horses and local items such as the leader Diao Mennai to apologize". However, the reason was only because "the middle official Yun Xian was sent to Lu Zhou for gifts, and Si Xingfa was criticized by Yun Xian for losing suburban hospitality." Si Xingfa was afraid, and even came to thank and begged for forgiveness. [40]For example, in the first month of the eleventh year of the Yongle reign, "Si Xingfa asked his younger brother Si Renfa to replace him," so he sent someone to pay tribute, hoping to obtain approval from the Ming Dynasty. [41]In December of the 20th year of the Yongle reign, the reason for this was "the crime of Xie Xingbing invading Nandian Prefecture". [42]In addition, the Si family also maintained great restraint when facing the intrusion of surrounding chieftains. For example, in April of the second year of the Yongle reign, during the tribute process, the tribute envoy Daomen Lai sent by Luchuan and Ping Myanmar, "Meng Yang and Mu Bang invaded their territory several times. Faced with the provocation of other chieftains, the Si family did not dare to send troops to provoke the war without authorization, but sought the help of the

Ming Dynasty to resolve it, demonstrating great respect for the central authority. In summary, it can be seen that during the Yongle period, the Si family made every effort to maintain a relatively harmonious relationship with the Ming Dynasty, creating a good external environment for restoring vitality. Therefore, this period was basically in a dormant state.

The dormancy of the Si family also received considerable rewards. For example, in each tribute activity, the Ming Dynasty gave extremely generous rewards. As mentioned earlier, the Si Xingfa apologized for his "loss of suburban etiquette" in paying tribute, and the Ming Chengzu once rewarded him with "two pieces of brocade, twenty pieces of gold weaving, silk, and gauze". [43] In addition, the Ming Dynasty also sent officials several times to Luchuan to reward the Si family. In addition, at the beginning of the reign of Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty, he was exempted from the "loss differential silver" requirement of "adding 18000 taels of silver". Therefore, the Si family gained economic support from the Ming Dynasty, laying the foundation for restoring the old power.

After the dormancy of the Yongle period, the power of the Si's clan recovered during the Xuande period, showing a considerable rise. Its political activities also showed signs of expansion, manifested in continuous conflicts with surrounding chieftains. In the first year of the Xuande reign, the Si family and Mubang "fought against each other to strengthen their borders, each suing the court". In April of the third year of the Xuande reign, the Three Departments of Yunnan issued the "Luchuan Xuancomfort envoy Si Renfa to seize the territories of Nandian Prefecture and other places" and "Please send troops to plead guilty". Emperor Xuanzong of the Ming Dynasty issued the "barbarian hatred and killing, which has existed since ancient times, but sent people to comfort and instruct". The following month, Mu Sheng, who was guarding Yunnan, also used the Si's clan to "invade places such as Nandian and Tengchong" and "request 50000 officials and soldiers from Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan, as well as local soldiers from various places, to besiege them. Emperor Xuanzong of the Ming Dynasty, while replying to the "already ordered the Qing and other officials to discuss and pacify the imperial decree," emphasized that "for several years, the army and civilians have been conscripting the enemy and fighting against the Sichuan bandits, but their labor and labor have not been improved." Therefore, "if they can obey, there is no need to use military. If they remain stubborn, they will stop the Yunnan government army and the local army, as well as the Mu Bang Xuan Wei Si and other barbarian soldiers from suppressing them." Half a month later, Mu Sheng reported the matter of "dispatching troops to suppress the Si family and" preparing food and salaries in various places in Jinchi ", Emperor Xuanzong of the Ming Dynasty still believed that "barbarian enemies and murders are common, should we use light military force?" In July of the following year, "Dao Bu Langban rebelled and returned to Luchuan, gathered a crowd to attack and rob the Lujiang pacification office, chased local officials to pacify the past wall and Jin Fang, killed seven people such as Gangyin Da Gang, looted property, and burned down residential buildings." Mu Sheng then "requested to send troops to demand it," but ultimately it was not resolved.

Emperor Xuanzong of the Ming Dynasty believed that the invasion and disturbance activities of the Si's clan, were the result of the aggressive nature of the "barbarians" and would not disrupt the order of the southwestern border areas. He also failed to realize the fact that the political ambitions of the Si's clan had once again sprouted and began to be initially put into practice. Therefore, it is no wonder that some scholars believe that the improper handling of the Luchuan issue during the Xuande period was an important reason for the Zhengtong "Three Expeditions of Luchuan". Of course, the Ming Dynasty did not do nothing, and certain measures were also taken to prevent the Si's clan from disrupting the local areas. For example, in June of the fifth year of Xuande, one of the important reasons for the establishment of the Yunnan Meng Myanmar Chief Court and the Yunnan Tan Mu Bing, Lei Bang, Ha Qiu, Long Mo, and Meng Lun Five Inspection Offices was to

"establish boundaries with integrity" and "fear of (Si's clan) invading and not being tired of". More than ten days later, the Yunnan Golden Tooth Military and Civilian Command Division Tengchong Prefecture was established, and a local official was appointed as a governor of the prefecture. The reason was that "Luchuan Xuan Wei Si Renfa occasionally killed and harassed the barbarians, begged for the establishment of a state government, appointed officials, and served as a governor alongside Tengchong's garrison of thousands of households, ensuring the safety of their people. In September of the eighth year of the Xuande reign, other institutions such as the "Kukang Pass, Kudao Pass, Kule Pass, and Guchong Pass in Tengchong Prefecture, Yunnan, and the Eight Inspection Departments of Laibangha, Jiulang, and Mangmengdong in Nandian Prefecture" were established, with the intention of suppressing and monitoring the Si's clan. However, in the face of the Si's clan's growing wings and resurgence of political ambition, the Ming Dynasty found it difficult to exert too much effect by setting up grassroots institutions and dispatching envoys to "pacify".

(3)The resurgence of status disputes during the Zhengtong period

There has been a lot of research in the academic community on the several military expeditions of Luchuan during the Zhengtong period, and I do not intend to elaborate on it here. However, the plan is to prove Luchuan's military activities in striving for a higher political status and analyze the countermeasures taken by the Ming Dynasty. Overall, there are three points worth re examining.

Firstly, regarding the issue of the Luchuan Si clan's intention to provoke war. If during the Xuande period, the Si family still had some concerns and only invaded the surrounding chieftains to test the attitude of the Ming Dynasty, then the political ambition of pursuing the status of a vassal state during the Zhengtong period can be completely exposed, and the political intention of Si Renfa to "recover the lost land of his father" is clear. Therefore, in the first year of the Zhengtong reign, he "occupied Mengding Prefecture and Wandian and other states, killed and plundered the people, and burned down Dianzhai." In October of the second year, he "occupied 278 villages under his jurisdiction, such as Luoboshuang." In the third year, he "invaded Nandian, Ganya, Tengchong, Lujiang, Jinchi, and other places." At the same time, he "abused and kidnapped hundreds of surnames, robbed elephant horses, harmed officials, plundered official ships, guarded the river mouth, and still built mountain strongholds to cut off communication. The area where Si Renfa launched an attack was not limited to the Tusi region. "Self reliant leaders such as Zhizhou Dao Zhenhan and Tuguan Zaoheng assisted them in their brutality, leading barbarians to invade the Golden Tooth." Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty also realized that Si was not just a belligerent behavior of "barbarians". "I used barbarian revenge as a common practice, and now I am invading the city. The following month, "Si Ren Fa built 300 ships along the river and wanted to take Yunlong Prefecture and other places". Based on this, it can be seen that the nature of the military activities of the Si's clan is completely different from the previously contested territory of ethnic minorities. Essentially, it challenges the authority of the Ming Dynasty in the southwest region, with the intention of even overthrowing the Ming Dynasty's rule in the ancient land of Luchuan, Pingma, and even Jinchi. The fundamental purpose is to establish a vassal state centered around the Si's clan in Luchuan.

Secondly, regarding the Ming Dynasty's conquest of the Luchuan Si's clan. Faced with the increasing ambition of the Si family, Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty still adopted a "pacification" policy in the early days, including continuing to accept tribute activities from Luchuan, sending officials to Luchuan to edict the Si family, understanding the advantages and disadvantages of using military control, and providing generous rewards. Against the backdrop of the ineffective activities mentioned above, the Ming and Ting sides adopted a method of sending troops to suppress the situation in Yunnan's border areas, in order to achieve stability. Even during the war between the two sides, the Ming Dynasty still hoped to eliminate the war through the

"imperial edict" of the Si's clan. For example, in March of the fifth year of the Zhengtong reign, Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty sent an imperial edict to the Yunnan Luchuan Propaganda and Comfort Department Propaganda and Comfort Envoy Si Renfa, saying:

You are in the distance and continue to pay tribute to us because the central government has implemented grace. Recently, you have changed your original intention and sent troops without authorization to invade the surrounding tribes, so many ministers in the court have requested to send troops to suppress you. The army has already set off, but I have told the commander-in-chief that if you can comply with my orders, we will immediately call back the army. Later, you sent Tao Mengdao and others to pay tribute to elephants, brocade, and other things, and then sent Meng Fang to pay tribute. I know you have a repentant heart, so now I send someone to forgive your previous sins. You should reform yourselves, have good neighborliness and friendship, and pay tribute like before. It won't be long before you can enjoy eternal peace. If you have any hidden information, you can report it in detail and I will handle it for you. If you don't understand my good intentions and go against heaven, my army will arrive and your family will be slaughtered. It will be too late to regret.

In this edict, Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty sincerely advised Si Renfa not to invade the surrounding areas, and promised that if Si Shi could awaken in a timely manner, all past crimes would not be pursued. Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty believed that sending people to pay tribute was a manifestation of "repentance". Later, he told frontline officials on the Yunnan battlefield, "The tired sending of people to pay tribute with objects such as brocade has already sprouted his repentance, but the path of reform has not yet begun. Today, he specially issued an edict to forgive sins such as Si Renfa. You then selected two or three people with insight and ordered them to reform themselves, thinking that one side is blessed with life, The edict given by Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty to the Si family was not an official cliché but a true idea. At the same time, the Ming Dynasty was still suspecting whether there were any other internal circumstances involved in the Siren Rebellion. Therefore, it was stated that "if you have any information or have not reached an agreement, you may provide detailed information and I will handle it." Similar edicts have been issued several times, and the sincerity of the rulers of the Ming dynasty is not insufficient. However, the Ming Dynasty was faced with a highly ambitious political ideology, which showed that no amount of sincerity could stop the war. Therefore, looking back at the motives behind the Zhengtong "Three Expeditions on the Lushan ", it is undoubtedly a war to defend national integrity and counter separatism. However, the deviation between pan dynastic politicization and the use of historical materials since the Ming and Qing dynasties has always been more negative than positive for this just war 600 years ago.

Finally, regarding the issue of both sides being in a state of war and still sending people to pay tribute to Lukawa. Tribute paying was originally a traditional act of loyalty from vassal states or neighboring ethnic minorities to the central dynasty under the "Huayi" order. However, the Ming Dynasty and Luchuan were already in a state of war, and the Si's clan still paid tribute. This phenomenon is worth pondering. According to the author's statistics, during the fourteen years of the Zhengtong system, the Si family sent people to pay tribute nearly ten times. From the speculations of the Ming Dynasty monarchs and ministers, it can be inferred that the purpose of the wartime action of the Sishi clan was to "repent" as mentioned earlier, and that "under the pretext of paying tribute, Yang was obedient, with the intention of delaying our teacher" or "to spy on the situation". we speculates that in addition to the above two possibilities, there may also be room for future activities. If the military operation failed, the Si family kept the means of communication with the Ming Dynasty by paying tribute on time. For example, in October of the fifth year of the Zhengtong reign, Si Renfa wrote a letter to the Yunnan General Officer,accusing the Lujiang pacification department of falsely accusing him of being an invader. "As a result, the army was

under pressure and there was no fear. Now, I want to send an envoy to apologize, beg for guidance, and act on behalf of the court, asking for mercy and avoiding further punishment." Obviously, the main way to apologize for "begging for guidance" is to pay tribute. Sure enough, after the failure of the rebellion, Sijifa sent his leader, Dao Meng Yong, and others to the court in March of the tenth year of the Zhengtong era to pay tribute of eighty taels of gold and one hundred and eighty taels of silver. Moreover, after being sent by the imperial court to suppress the rebellion, he had already fled to Myanmar. Therefore, he repented of his wrongdoing and begged for forgiveness for the rest of his life. He hoped to request the Ming Dynasty's forgiveness through paying tribute. At the same time, paying tribute is an act of loyalty, and continuing to do so also leaves room for the lenient treatment of the Ming Dynasty after the failure of the Si family. And if the military activities of Si Renfa successfully forced the Ming Dynasty to recognize its occupation of the surrounding areas, and even achieve a successful transformation from the Chief Secretary to Annan like Jiaozhi, then tribute activities would be even more necessary. The Ming Dynasty is the political, economic, and cultural center of East Asia, and its influence on the Zhou border ethnic groups and vassal states is self-evident. If Luchuan wants to have a relaxed external environment and join the Ming Dynasty's tribute system, therefore, it is imperative to establish the political status of a vassal state. From what has been said above, it can be seen that maintaining tribute activities is beneficial to the development of Siren without any harm.

Through the above reinterpretation of the political activities of the Luchuan Si's clan in the early Ming Dynasty, it can be found that during the Hongwu period, the Si's clan first returned to the vassal state and then rebelled, hoping to continue its comprehensive development as in the Yuan Dynasty and strive for the status of a vassal state. However, it was resolutely suppressed by the Ming Dynasty. Due to the setbacks during the Hongwu period and internal problems, the Si family actively paid tribute during the Yongle period, paying attention to maintaining good relations with the Ming Dynasty, and was generally in a dormant stage; During the Zhengde period, the power of the Si's clan recovered and began to attack surrounding chieftains. During the Zhengtong period, the political ambition of Si Renfa to seek a vassal state erupted once again, ultimately leading to the subsequent "Three Expeditions of Luchuan". Overall, during the early Ming Dynasty, the Si family experienced a process of prosperity, setbacks, dormancy, resurgence, and decline, with its core always centered on the pursuit of higher political status. The Ming government, on the other hand, hoped that the ethnic minorities in southwestern China, including Luchuan, would serve as the "barrier" for the southwest, while An'an would serve as a local official under the central government, maintaining a relationship between monarchs and ministers. Therefore, the expansion of Si's political ambition and the opposition to the border governance policies of the Ming Dynasty were the fundamental reasons for the Luchuan issue in the early Ming Dynasty and even the subsequent outbreak of the "Three Expeditions".

4. The Border Region Form of the Ming Dynasty from the Perspective of the Luchuan Problem

In fact, the Luchuan issue in the early Ming Dynasty was quite typical, and similar situations were often seen among the surrounding ethnic minorities under the rule of ancient China. Starting from the Luchuan issue, we can further consider the border forms and characteristics of the Ming Dynasty from the perspective of status struggle.

Japanese scholar Takeshi Hamashita believes that "the tribute relationship with China as the core and closely related to the entire region of Asia, as well as the tribute trade relationship formed on this basis, is the only historical system that only Asia has". On this basis, it is further proposed that "from a political perspective, the tribute relationship is a system in which Chinese rulers expanded

the ruling relationship between the central and local governments to the periphery and four sides, arranged in the order of the central government, provinces, vassals (chieftains, officials), tribute states, and mutual market states, and staggered in a concentric circle of adjacent centers and peripheral relationships. This system gradually matured in the 16th and 17th centuries. The hierarchical structure of Binxia Wuzhi summarizes the relationship between the central and local governments, as well as the peripheral areas during the Qing Dynasty, and is often viewed from an economic perspective. In fact, its concentric circle theory also has some inspiration for us to observe the ancient border areas of China. Specifically, in the Ming Dynasty, the degree of intimacy between the central government and its surrounding areas can be roughly divided into: the central government - provinces, prefectures, counties - chieftains, Mongolia, Tibet, Jurchen, Hui, etc. - vassal states - mutual market states, etc. With the central government as the core, each province, prefecture, and county as the first circle, and the chieftains and other officials as the second circle. By extrapolating from this, the closer the circle is, the closer it is to the central government of the Ming Dynasty and the stricter it is managed by the Ming Dynasty.

5. Conclusion

It is not difficult to find that the border issues in ancient China have a prominent feature, which is that each circle is not rigid and unchanging, based on the theory of circles and the aforementioned Luchuan problem. The Luchuan problem in the late Yuan and early Ming dynasties is a typical example. Overall, from the perspective of circle theory, the Si's clan is generally located in the second circle. However, in the early Ming Dynasty, the Si's clan attempted to break away from its status as a chieftain under the Ming Dynasty, intending to transform from the second circle to the third vassal state circle. The game between the Ming Dynasty and the Si family resulted in the Si family wandering between two different circles for a long time. At the same time, there were also various Mongolian tribes occupying the north, such as the Tatar, Wara, and Wuliangha tribes. From a formal perspective, the Mongolian tribes, like Luchuan, nominally accepted the titles of the Ming Dynasty, but the Ming Dynasty did not directly manage the Mongolian tribes. The relationship between the two was quite complex during wartime. Some scholars refer to this time as the "new Northern and Southern Dynasties" from the perspective of the confrontation between the Ming Dynasty and the Northern Yuan Dynasty - the northern and southern regimes of Mongolia. This statement is clearly worth further discussion. But asserting that the various Mongolian tribes were directly under the jurisdiction of the Ming Dynasty may seem a bit farfetched. Therefore, the second circle between prefectures, counties, and vassal states (mostly located in the border areas of the Central Dynasty), such as Luchuan and various Mongolian tribes, has a clear swing, which is a historical phenomenon. However, we do not need to judge their political attributes from a binary perspective of either black or white. Under the influence of various factors such as historical concepts, the strength of the Central Dynasty, border governance measures, internal and external factors of local political power, etc, the border ethnic groups may have different tendencies, but in terms of form, they are undoubtedly under the jurisdiction of China. Of course, the integration of border ethnic groups into the Chinese national community mostly involves a process of contact and adjustment, during which there may be pain, but the overall trend will not change. During this period, there has been a history of interaction, exchange, and ultimately integration, which together constitute the current Chinese national community and form a pattern of diversity and unity. Finally, it should be emphasized that we need to remain vigilant in applying the concept of modern sovereign states to the study of ancient China's border morphology, as China has a unique development path that belongs to the historical characteristics of China's border areas. In this framework, there is no need to delineate clear borders. Border ethnic groups produce and live on the

"edge of China" under various factors, but after modern Western forces invaded China, this development path of ancient China was interrupted, the concept of modern state has replaced the inherent border order of traditional China.

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Data Availability

The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The author states that this article has no conflict of interest.

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