

# *A Study on the Price of Mongolian Tribute Horses in the Early Ming Dynasty*

Haoxuan Zhu<sup>1</sup> and Zhuojun Jiang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Liberal Arts, Nantong University, Nantong 226000, Jiangsu, China

<sup>2</sup>Student of the History Department of College of Liberal Arts, Nantong University, Nantong 226000, Jiangsu, China

**Keywords:** Early Ming Dynasty, Mongolian ministries, Tribute horses; Horse price

**Abstract:** In the early Ming Dynasty, (1) the main tribute of Mongolian ministries was horses, and the Ming court mostly used textiles as a means of payment. According to the uniform conversion of the tribute horse price given by the Ming Dynasty to the Mongolian ministries, the tribute horse price is far higher than the market price. In addition to other rewards to the Mongolian tribes, the actual economic expenditure of the Ming Dynasty is higher. Tribute horses activities provide a way for exchanges between the Ming and Mongolian sides, and also meet the practical needs of the exchange and interdependence of agriculture and nomadic economy. However, the officially led tribute horses activities also have strong limitations. First, the trade between the two sides does not follow the law of market equivalent transactions, which is difficult to maintain for a long time. Secondly, the tribute horses trade is limited to the upper level, and the general public has not fully participated in it, and the benefits are limited.

## 1. Introduction

The tribute activities between the Ming Dynasty and Mongolian originated in Hongwu and formed in Yongle. They further developed during the Renzong and Xuanzong period and reached their peak during the Zhengtong period, while they remained stable during the Jingtai period. Tribute played an extremely important role during this period. It was not only an important way for political, economic, and cultural exchanges between Ming and Mongolia, but also a barometer of the development of Ming and Mongolian relations, which played a significant role in the bilateral relationship. The research results on Ming and Mongolian tribute in the academic community are extremely fruitful, and are often interpreted from macro perspectives such as politics or economy. (2) We select a micro perspective and focuses on the issue of the price of tribute horses in various Mongolian tribes during the period from Yongle to Jingtai. In the tribute offerings of various Mongolian tribes, horses are the bulk, so the price of tribute horses is the core issue in the Ming and

Mongolian tribute. The proper handling of this issue directly affects the relationship between the two sides. Regarding the issue of horse prices, we believe that it is necessary to deepen the discussion on the following issues: firstly, the specific situation of tribute horse prices in various periods from Yongle to Jingtai; Secondly, is the price of Mongolian tribute horses relatively high or low compared to horse markets or other regions? Thirdly, by sorting out the prices of Mongolian tribute horses, summarizing the characteristics of tribute horses, and then examining the actual state of Ming and Mongolian exchanges from the perspective of tribute, in order to deepen the understanding of tribute issues.

(1) There is still controversy in the academic community over the issue of the Ming Dynasty's periodization. For the convenience of writing, as mentioned in this article, the "early Ming Dynasty" was set during the Hongwu to Jingtai periods.

(2) The achievements of interpreting Mongolian tribute from a political perspective include: Yu Moying's "The Issue of Tribute Granting in Hami Mongolia during the Ming Dynasty", published in the Journal of Inner Mongolia University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), Issue 5, 2000; Cao Yongnian's "General History of the Mongolian Ethnic Group (Volume 3)", Hohhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 2002; Cheng Nina's "Ming Dynasty Wuliangha Mongolian Tribute System of Three Guards", published in the second issue of "Historical Collected Journal" in 2016, etc; The achievements of interpreting Mongolian tribute from an economic perspective include: Hu Fan's "On the Conflict between Ming Emperor Shizong's" Jue Gong "Policy towards Mongolia and Agricultural and Pastoral Culture during the Jiajing Period", published in "Research on Chinese Border History and Geography", Issue 4, 2005; Jinxing' Research on Trade between the Ming Dynasty and Mongolia ', Ph.D. Dissertation of Inner Mongolia University, 2012; Yu Moying's "Research on Mongolian Regulations on the Mutual Market of Ming and Mongolian Tributaries", published in Journal of Inner Mongolia University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), Issue 6, 2013; Liu Shu and Yang

## **2. The Horse Price of Mongolian Tribute Horses from Yongle to Xuande Period**

During the Hongwu period, the Ming Dynasty was in a state of hostility to various Mongolian tribes except for the three tribes of Wuliangha, and a stable tribute relationship had not yet been established between the two sides. However, at this time, Emperor Taizu of the Ming Dynasty had already established a relatively complete tribute system and included neighboring vassal states and numerous minority ethnic groups in the system. [1] This laid the institutional foundation for the establishment of tribute relations between Ming and Mongolia in the future. At the beginning of Ming Chengzu's accession to the throne, he frequently sent envoys to various Mongolian tribes, actively improving bilateral relations. The Tatar, Wara and other tribes also responded positively and began sending people to Beijing to pay tribute. The Ming and Mongolian dynasties began to establish a fixed mechanism of communication and exchange.

Due to the grassland location of various parts of Mongolia, where animal husbandry is developed, the tribute mainly consists of horses. In the Ming Dynasty, if there is tribute, there is reward. Regarding the issue of tribute and reward, it has been customized during the Hongwu period. Firstly, the principle of "gifts to others are higher than other gifts to me" was adopted, which means that the actual value of reward goods far exceeds that of tribute goods. In the 26th year of the Hongwu reign, it was clearly stated that "All the envoys from vassal states and four other tribes, as well as all officials including dukes and marquises, shall be granted all kinds of rewards. If there are precedents from previous years, they shall be followed accordingly. If not, careful consideration shall be given to their rank and status before making a decision." [2] As for the Mongolian tribute horse reward, the horse price level was determined. The Ming Dynasty generally established reward

standards based on the tribute horse side and other levels, which became a fixed practice. Afterwards, the price was determined according to the regulations.

The earliest person to determine the price of tribute horses was the WuLiangha. In November of the first year of Yongle, Haerwudai, the leader of Wuliangha, sent his subordinates tuohusi to pay tribute horses. Ming Chengzu ordered "to give Chaobi, Xiyi, and compensate their horse value". The specific standards were: "A first-class horse, worth fifty ingots of Chao; A Medium horse, forty ingots of Chao; A Lower-class horse, thirty ingots of Chao. Each horse is still given one colored currency." [3] Therefore, it can be seen that the Ming Dynasty divided the tribute horses of Wuliangha into three levels based on their quality, namely--first-class, medium, and lower-class, and corresponding clear horse prices. So how does this price compare to the market horse price? We selected the horse prices set by the Ming court in Kaiyuan, Liaodong and Guangning horse markets as reference objects. In the third year of Yongle, in the horse market trade, "A first-class horse, worth four pieces of silk and six pieces of cloth", [4] for convenience in comparison, we can convert the latter into Baochao. Due to limited records, it is difficult to have a clear understanding of the official price situation in the third year of Yongle. Therefore, it is most reasonable to choose a discount situation close to that year. According to records, in the 30 year of the Hongwu reign, the people of Shangxi were unable to pay taxes. Therefore, officials of the Ming court "discussed that before the 28th year of the Hongwu reign, all areas were allowed to pay off the overdue rent and taxes based on the productivity of the land, and they could compensate with materials such as cloth, silk, cotton, gold, and silver." The specific standard proposed was: "One ingot of Chao is equivalent to one dan of rice; One gold, equivalent to ten dan rice; One silver, equivalent to two dan rice; A piece of silk is equivalent to one dan and two buckets of rice; A piece of cotton cloth is equivalent to a dan of rice..." The Ming Taizu believed that the conversion was too heavy, therefore, it is determined that, "The price of every gold and silver is doubled, two guan and five-hundred wen is equivalent to one dan of rice. Everything else will be handled according to my order." [1] Based on this, it can be inferred that the official price is: Two guan and five-hundred wen, equivalent to one dan of rice; One gold, equivalent to twenty dan rice; One silver, equivalent to four dan rice; A piece of silk is equivalent to one dan and two buckets of rice; A piece of cotton cloth is equivalent to a dan of rice.

In the conversion standards for grain weight and currency measurement units in the Ming Dynasty, ten buckets were considered one dan, one thousand wen was considered one guan, and the five guan Baochao were considered one ingot. Based on this and the above standards, the silk can be converted into Baochao at first. Ming Dynasty government regulates 1 piece of silk is equivalent to 1.2 dan rice, and 0.5 ingots of Baochao (two guan and five-hundred wen) can be converted into 1 dan rice, that means, 1 piece of silk is equivalent to 1.2 dan rice or 0.6 ingots of Baochao; Therefore, 4 pieces of silk can be converted into 4.8 dan rice or 2.4 ingots of Baochao. And then the cloth converted into Baochao. According to the previous text, one piece of cotton cloth can be converted into one dan rice, so one piece of cotton cloth is equivalent to 0.5 ingots of Baochao.

In the third year of the Yongle reign, the horse prices of Kaiyuan and Guangning horse markets in the Ming Dynasty were determined. The prices of the top grade horses in Wuliangha were four pieces of silk and six pieces of cloth, which were converted into Baochao. That is, four pieces of silk were equivalent to 4.8 ingots of Baochao, and six pieces of cloth were equivalent to 3 ingots of Baochao. Therefore, for each top grade horse, Wuliangha could obtain 7.8 ingots of Baochao from the horse market. Whereas Wuliangha paid tribute to the first-class horses to Ming dynasty, each of which can received 50 ingots of Baochao, and in addition, each horse is still given a colored currency. The difference in horse prices between the two was more than 6.4 times. Based on this, it can be seen that the price of tribute horses in WuliangHa is much higher than that of horse trading market horses. In the fifteenth year of the Yongle reign, Jiang Liu, the commander of the Liaodong

Army, believed that the price of horses in the Ming and Mongolian horse markets was very high. Emperor Chengzu believed that "what Jiang said is true." Therefore, he ordered the Ministry of War to decide and implement it. [5] After the Ming court lowered the horse market prices, it further widened the price gap between tribute horses and the horse market.

Under the efforts of Emperor Chengzu's several envoys, the Tatar and Wara tribes sent people to Beijing to pay tribute in the fifth and sixth years of Yongle, respectively. In May of the seventh year of the Yongle reign, Ming Dynasty also conferred the titles of Mahamu from the Wara tribe as the Jinziguanguadafu and Shunning King, Taiping as the Jinziguanguadafu and Xianyi King, and Tu Boluo as Jinziguanguadafu and Anle King; [5] In July of the eleventh year of the Yongle, Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty conferred the title of Hening king on Tartar Grand Master Alutai. [5] As a result, the Wara and Tatar tribes became at least nominally vassals of the Ming Dynasty, and tribute payment became the main way of communication between the two sides during this period, gradually becoming institutionalized. In this context, almost every year, a large number of tribute horses from Tatar and Wara tribes entered the territory of the Ming Dynasty, and the price of tribute horses was gradually determined accordingly. First, let's look at the price of the tribute horses from the Tatar tribe. In December of the ninth year of the Yongle reign, the Grand Master of the Tatar tribe, Alutai, sent envoys such as Cheri Timur to send a thousand tribute horses. And, Emperor Chengzu of the Ming Dynasty ordered the Ministry of Rites to give the horses a price. But the specific price of the horses was not recorded. In the first month of the 18th year of the Yongle reign, King Alutai of Hening and Yexiantugan sent envoys and commanders, such as Qiamuding, to 900 tribute horses. Emperor Chengzu of Ming ordered "each to give Baochao, literary ornaments, and Xiyi", as well as "to give horses price." [5] Other records may include the number of tribute horses, but there is no specific record of horse prices; Or perhaps there is a specific record of horse prices, but there is no number of tribute horses. Therefore, the price of tribute horses from the Tatar tribe during this period cannot be calculated.

Let's take a look at the price of Wara tribute's horses. In the ninth year of Yongle, When the Ming court gave in return the Mahamud tribute horses of King Shunning of the Wara tribe, it was stipulated that "the first-class horse, each rewarded with ten colored satin." [6] The price records of other grades of tribute horses in the Wara tribe appeared during the Xuande period: the medium horse, each rewarded with ten colored satin and two pieces of Zhechaojuan; the lower-class horse, each rewarded with a piece of Zhusi, eight pieces of silk and one piece of Zhechaojuan; the more inferior horse, each rewarded with six pieces of silk, and one piece of Zhechaojuan... Those dead horses and newborn horses in halfway, each rewarded with three pieces of silk and half a piece of Zhechaojuan. "[6] The price of tribute horses in the Wara tribe is thus clear. However, due to the fact that the content of the horse price given in return during this period was mostly textiles that cannot be converted, such as colored satin and Zhechaojuan. Therefore, we will examine the relative prices of horses in the Wallaby region compared to those in other regions. Take the early years of Xuande as an example. According to records, in October of the first year of the Xuande reign, "due to the obstruction of the Baochao's law and repeated prohibitions by the Ming Dynasty, there has been no circulation so far, there are many people who have issued the cover, but few who have entered it." Therefore, the financial of institution suggested that the items be forcibly linked to the Baochao. The specific standards related to the conversion here are: 2500 guan per piece of Zhusi, 500 guan per piece of silk, and 200 guan per piece of official cotton. [7] It can be inferred that the price of the lower-class horses under Wara's command is one piece of zhusi, eight pieces of silk, and one piece of Zhechaojuan, which can be converted into 6500 guan Baochao and one piece of Zhechaojuan; The more inferior horses each consist of 3000 guan (six pieces of silk) and one piece of Zhechaojuan.

In October of the first year of Xuande, the "Western Fan Guoshi" also sent people to Beijing to

pay tribute, including a considerable number of horses. The Ming Dynasty set the price of their tribute horses based on their quality,--the standard is: "A medium horse, give 250 ingots of Chao and one piece of Zhusi; a lower-class horse, give 200 ingots of Chao and one piece of Zhusi; a more inferior horse, give 80 ingots of Chao and one piece of Zhusi. For those who are sick and thin, each horse will receive 60 ingots of Chao and two pieces of silk." [7] So the price of the lower-class horses from "Xifan" is 200 ingots of Baochao(1000 guan) and a piece of Zhusi(2500 guan), totaling 3500 guan. And the more inferior horse is eighty ingots of Baochao(400 guan) and one piece of Zhusi(2500 guan), totaling 2900 coins. From this, it can be seen that the price of the lower-class tribute horses under the Wara tribe exceeds that of "Xifan" by more than twice, and the price of more inferior tribute horses under the Wara tribe also far exceeds that of the latter.

In May of the second year of the Xuande reign, North Korea sent 20000 horses, and the Ming Dynasty set a total horse price of 40000 Da-cloth and 60000 Da-silk (official silk). [7] the average price for each horse was two pieces of cloth and three pieces of silk, which was converted into Baochao of 400 Guan (two pieces of cloth) and 1500 Guan (three pieces of silk). Therefore, the average price for each horse was 1900 Guan, which was even much lower than the price of the more inferior tribute horses under the Tatar and Wara tribes.

According to the above analysis, the price of Mongolian tribute horses far exceeds that of horse markets, and their prices are also higher than those of other ethnic minority tribute horses such as "Xifan".

### **3. The Price of Mongolian Tribute Horses during the Zhengtong and Jingtai Periods**

After decades of management of tribute activities by the Ming court during the Yongle to Xuande periods, coupled with the brief unification of the Wara and Tatar tribes, the two tribes often sent people together to pay tribute. Therefore, during the Zhengtong period, the tribute horse activities of various Mongolian tribes, especially the Tatar and Wara tribes, reached their highest level since the Ming Dynasty, manifested in an increase in tribute frequency and an expansion of the scale of tribute horses. During this period, thousands of horses entered the Ming Dynasty through tribute activities. The sudden "Tububao Incident" in September of the 14th year of the Zhengtong reign did not permanently cut off tribute activities between the Ming and Mongolian dynasties. During the Jingtai period, there were still large-scale tribute horse activities between the two sides. The surge in the number of tribute horses led the Ming government to further regulate the pricing of horses.

Firstly, during the Zhengtong and Jingtai periods, the Ming Dynasty refined the pricing of tribute horses and horses for Tatar and Wara tribes. At the same time, a classification reward system was established, which was to set horse prices based on the official rank of the tribute party. In the second year of the Zhengtong reign, Emperor Yingzong of the Ming Dynasty stipulated that "the reward should be given to the tribal leader, general leaders, envoys, and other officials, and each horse should be given in the two colored satin." It can be seen that the Ming court had not previously established horse prices based on the classification of the official ranks of the tribute party, and the prices of each horse were not divided into different levels, but were unified. The price of each tribute horse is given in the two colored satin, which seems to have decreased compared to the Yongle and Xuande periods. In the fourth year of the Zhengtong reign, the Ming court further added, "When envoys and others continue to enter the capital to tribute, they will be rewarded according to the lower-class horse regulations. This time, it was clarified that the tribute horses of the envoys were rewarded according to the lower class of horses, while the "tribal leader" and "chieftain" were not affected. This indicates that the Ming Dynasty began to implement classified rewards and set corresponding horse price standards. In the sixth year of the Zhengtong reign, it was

also established that "the horses of the envoys were divided into three grades, and the horses of the tribal leader and the subchief were not divided into different grades." [2] This time, the Ming court changed the regulations of the second year of the Zhengtong reign, and the envoys' horses were divided into three grades to set horse prices. The "tribal leader" and the "subchief" continued to maintain a unified horse price. The implementation of the classification and reward system for tribute horses indicates that the Ming Dynasty government was aware of the hierarchical differences within the various Mongolian tribes, so the horse prices of general leaders were lower than those of tribal rulers, with the aim of strengthening the attraction of high-level rulers in each tribe.

During the Jingtai period, the Ming government basically continued the old horse price standards, [8] but there were also measures to adjust the price of tribute horses slightly, mainly focusing on lower class horses. In the second year of the Jingtai reign, the price of the lower-class horses was "one piece of Zhusi per horse, eight pieces of silk, and one piece of Zhechaojuan." [8] In December of the fourth year of the Jingtai reign, when officials from the Ministry of Rites discussed the price of a reward to the vassals, they talked about the reward to Wara. The price of the lower-class horses was "one piece of Zhusi and nine pieces of silk per horse." [8] In the price the lower-class horses, one piece of Zhechaojuan was exchanged for one piece of silk, and the price did not change much.

Secondly, the Ming Dynasty began to set corresponding horse prices for different varieties of tribute horses. There are three main types of horses introduced by various Mongolian tribes, namely Da-horse, Alugu-horse, and Xi-horse. Da-horse, also known as the horse raised by the Mongols, is the horse species with the highest number of tribute from various Mongolian tribes; Alugu-horse, originally referring to a mixed breed horse, can be traced back to Central or West Asian horse breeds, mainly consisting of a mixture of tall Western horses and short Mongolian horses. Xi-horse is a general term, such as the Alugu-horse, which is called "Little Xi-horse", while "Big Xi-horse" refers to "Tubicha", meaning a large horse from the West. Starting from the Zhengtong period, the Ming Dynasty began to set different horse prices for different horse breeds. For example, in the eighth year of the Zhengtong period, "Grand tutor Alugu-horse, each with six colored satins... In the ninth year of the Zhengtong period, Xi-horse, each reward with five colored satins on the inside and ten pieces of silk." Four years later, the Alugu-horse was changed and each horse was given four colored satins. [2] In May of the sixth year of the Jingtai reign, the Ming court clearly stated that "A horse is worth two colored satins, twice as much as Alugu-horse [8]."

Finally, after sorting out the prices of tribute horses during the Zhengtong and Jingtai periods, what was the price of horses during this period?

Although the standard of horse prices in the Ming Dynasty did not change much from the Xuande period at this time, considering that the treasure Baochaos had actually withdrawn from the market and that the people mostly used silver as a means of payment, coupled with changes in prices over a decade, it is more in line with historical facts to compare horse prices into silver. During this period, Mongolian horse prices were mainly paid for in three types of textiles: silk, colored satin, and Zhusi. Therefore, we need to understand the prices of these three items. The value of 'silk' is relatively common. In the sixth year of the Zhengtong reign, officials of Fanchang County in Zhili requested that "Summer tax--silk could be converted into taels of silver", and thus decided that "one piece of silk could convert into five taels of silver" [8] Therefore, one piece of silk is worth 0.5 taels of silver.

The value of Zhusi is relatively rare, and the conversion records closest to the Jingtai period appear during the Tianshun period. At that time, the central official Lin Kuan requested that "the Buzhengsi of Zhejiang province and the four prefectures of Suzhou, Songzhou, Huizhou, and Changzhou be directly under the jurisdiction of the government, and this year's silver exchange for autumn grain of 120000 dans to buy 10000 pieces of green, red, and green Zhusi." [8] It can be seen that autumn grain of 120000 dans can buy 10000 pieces of juicy silk, so the value ratio of autumn

grain to Zhusi is 12:1, which means twelve dans of autumn grain can be exchanged for a piece of Zhusi. In February of the second year of the Tianshun reign, the Buzhengsi of Shanxi set the conversion standard for autumn grain as "A tael of silver can convert 4 dan rice." [8] It can be seen that each dan of autumn grain is 0.25 taels, and the twelve dans of autumn grain are 3 taels, so one piece of Zhusi is equivalent to 3 taels of silver. The value of colored satin is also recorded. In May of the second year of the Jingtai reign, when the Ming court collected taxes, it was determined that "those who are willing to accept colored satin, each piece will be converted into ten dans rice." [8] If one dan rice can be converted into 0.25 taels of silver, then each piece of colored satin can be converted into 2.5 taels of silver.

In summary, during the Zhengtong and Jingtai periods, each piece of silk could be converted into 0.5 taels of silver, each piece of Zhusi could be converted into 3 taels of silver, and each piece of colored satin could be converted into 2.5 taels of silver. According to the second year of the Jingtai reign, the Ming court gave in return the horse price standards to the Wara and Tatar tribes were "the first-class horses, each given four colored satin and eight pieces of silk; the medium horses, each given two colored satin and two pieces of silk; the lower-class horses, each given one piece of Zhusi, eight pieces of silk and a piece of Zhechaojuan; the more inferior horses, each given six pieces of silk and a piece of Zhechaojuan. To convert the horse price, it is necessary to understand the equivalent relationship between "one Biaoli" and "one piece". "Biaoli" refers to the exterior and interior of a garment, where one Biaoli is approximately equal to one piece. As for the Zhechaojuan, we have not yet found a record of its conversion. Based on the above conversion, it can be inferred that the price of first-class horses is: four Biaoli of colored satins (4 pieces, 2.5 taels per piece, totaling 10 taels), eight pieces of silk (8 pieces, 0.5 taels per piece, totaling 4 taels), and each horse is 14 taels of silver; The price of medium horses is: 2 Biaoli of colored satin (2 pieces, 2.5 taels per price, totaling 5 taels), 2 pieces of Zhechaojuan, and each horse is 5 taels of silver and 2 pieces of Zhechaojuan; The price of the lower-class horses is: one piece of Zhusi (3 taels), eight pieces of silk (8 pieces, 0.5 taels per piece, totaling 4 taels), and one piece of Zhechaojuan. Each horse is 7 taels of silver and one piece of Zhechaojuan; The price of the more inferior horses is: six pieces of silk (6 pieces, 0.5 taels per price, totaling 3 taels), one piece of Zhechaojuan, and each horse is 3 taels of silver and one piece of Zhechaojuan. During the reign of Emperor Yingzong, in December of the fourth year of the Jingtai reign, for the lower-class horse from Wara, the Ming court offered a price of "one piece of Zhusi and nine pieces of silk" [8], totaling approximately 7.5 taels of silver.

During this period, the horse prices given by the Ming Dynasty to the Tatar and Wara tribes were still quite high, especially compared to the domestic horse prices. In July of the first year of Jingtai, when the army in Datong was short of horses, the Ming Dynasty ordered them to be bought at the homes of the military and civilians. The buying price was set as follows: "For every first-class horse, one was priced at six taels of silver; for every medium horse, it was priced at four taels of silver; for every lower-class horse, it was priced at three taels of silver." [8] The price of the first-class horses tribute by the Tatar and Wara tribes was twice that of civilian's horses, with only two taels remaining. The price of medium and the lower-class tribute horses far exceeded the domestic price. Even the first-class horses purchased within the Ming domestic market were lower in price than the lower-class horses given in return to Mongolia. It can be seen that during this period, the tribute horse prices set by the Ming court for the Tatar and Wara tribes followed the reward principle of "gifts to others are higher than other gifts to me" established during the reign of Emperor Taizu. At the same time, it indirectly indicates that the tribute trade between the Ming and Mongolian sides did not follow the market equivalent exchange law at that time.

#### 4. The Communication and Integration between Ming and Mongolia from the Perspective of Tribute Horses

Through the above analysis of the evolution of Ming and Mongolian tribute horse prices from Yongle to Jingtai periods, it is not difficult to find that each Mongolian tribute's horse during this period had the following four characteristics.

Firstly, based on the previous conversion of the prices of Mongolian tribute horses in the early Ming Dynasty, it can be seen that both parties did not follow the market value law. There have been multiple discussions on this feature in the previous text, so I will not go into further detail.

Secondly, from the perspective of tribute, there is a gradual decline in the quality of Mongolian tribute horses. This characteristic can be inferred from specific historical records. For example, in December of the first year of the Jingtai reign, the Wara's envoy Kutubuhua and other officials "pay tribute 329 horses". After inspecting the quality of the horses, the Imperial Horse Supervisor determined that "there were two lower-class horses and 327 more inferior horses". The Emperor Daizong "ordered to follow the example below, and each horse was given one piece of Zhusi, eight pieces of silk, and one piece of Zhechajuan." [8] Therefore, it can be seen that the quality of the Wara tribute horses was not ideal, The main horses in this tribute were more inferior horses, with only two lower-class horses, while none of the upper and middle class horses were found. The low quality of its tribute horses is evident. Both sides even had conflicts due to the abundance of inferior horses and the low price of horses offered by the Ming court. In December of the second year of the Jingtai reign, the then Minister of Rites, YingHu, wrote: "The Vala Tuotuo Buhua King in northern Yi, and the Grand Master also sent envoys from all sides to pay tribute to the horses" and formulated corresponding horse prices. The specific standards are as follows: "For the first-class horses, each horse is given four colored satins and eight silk; for the medium horses, each horse is given two colored satins and two pieces of Zhechaojuan; for the lower-class horses, each horse is given a piece of Zhusi, eight pieces of silk, and one piece of Zhechaojuan; for more inferior horses, each horse is given six pieces of silk and one piece of Zhechaojuan" However, this reward standard was strongly opposed by the Mongolian envoy, and the envoy Chazhan stated that "gifts are thin and not accepted". The Emperor Daizong, citing the principle of "not losing the hearts of distant people", believed that "There is no need to compare with barbarians. Every more inferior horse is rewarded according to the rules of lower-class horses." [8] This way, the disputes between the two sides were resolved. But from the side, it can also be seen that the quality of Wara's tribute horse this time is not ideal.

Thirdly, from the perspective of payment methods for horse prices, the content of horse prices given in return by the Ming court has undergone certain changes, which generally conforms to the changes in economic background. During the Yongle period, the horse prices obtained by Wuliangha were Baochao and rice, then came precious textiles. If the period was extended to the mid to late Ming Dynasty, silver was used as a means of payment for tribute horses in the Ming Dynasty, which was closely related to the gradual withdrawal of Baochao from society and the trend of silver currency.

Finally, the functions of tribute horses underwent a gradual evolution from political functions during the Yongle and Xuande periods to economic functions. During the Yongle and Renxuan periods, various Mongolian tribes had frequent tribute horses, but according to records, their scale was limited and their political communication and exchange attributes were stronger. During the Zhengtong and Jingtai periods, as the tribute system became increasingly standardized, the tribute horse activities between the two sides were fully spread, and records of thousands of people carrying thousands of tribute horses were kept in books, emphasizing their economic and communication attributes. As for the conflicts that may arise between the two sides in the future,



they often revolve around tribute activities, and the root cause should lie in the economic aspect.

The sorting out of the tribute horse prices of various Mongolian tribes during the Yongle to Jingtai period may serve as a way for us to examine the actual communication between Ming and Mongolia during this period from the perspective of tribute paying, and deepen our understanding of this issue on this basis.

From a political perspective, the tribute horses activities broke the long-standing hostility between Ming and Mongolia, providing a stable way for both sides to communicate and exchange ideas. During the Yongle period, many leaders of the Wara and Tatar tribes accepted the imperial edicts of the Ming Dynasty under the name of tribute. Afterwards, the two sides frequently exchanged envoys for political exchanges.

From an economic perspective, the tribute horse activities between Ming and Mongolia also conform to the practical needs and historical laws of nomadic and agricultural economic exchanges, mutual exchange and complementarity. After the downfall of the Yuan Dynasty, the Mongolian people returned to the Mongolian grasslands, and their social production mode resumed to a nomadic form, mainly characterized by an extensive nomadic animal husbandry economy. YongnianCao once said, "Throughout the Ming Dynasty for over 200 years, Mongolian society was basically an extensive nomadic economy, but it was particularly prominent in the early Ming Dynasty. "Mongolia's economic form determines that its food, iron, and handicrafts represented by textiles cannot be self-sufficient, and frequent wars further exacerbate this dilemma. For the Ming Dynasty, the state of confrontation and even the occurrence of war required a huge amount of manpower, material resources, and financial resources, and posed a threat to the state power. Moreover, the horses abundant in Mongolia could also serve as production tools for Ming society. Therefore, from the perspective of practical needs, both parties urgently need to seek a fixed way of communication and exchange, and tribute can play such a role for a certain period of time. Through the tribute horse activities, the Ming Dynasty obtained horses, and various Mongolian tribes received necessities such as food and textiles. The agricultural economy and nomadic economy, as well as agricultural culture and nomadic culture, were organized into a complementary and interdependent relationship.

However, tribute horse activities are not an absolute remedy for maintaining positive exchanges between the two sides, because the official led tribute horse trade has strong limitations. On the one hand, the horse prices of tribute horse activities do not comply with the law of market equivalent transactions, which determines that this trade behavior is difficult to sustain for a long time. Rewards that are several times the actual value of horses can be sustained during the strong and prosperous Ming Dynasty. Once the national strength decreases or the relationship between Ming and Mongolia deteriorates, it is very easy to break off. For example, the long-term implementation of the "tribute cutting" policy during the Jiajing period is the best proof, and the two sides once again fall into a state of confrontation for decades, Causing harm to ordinary people. On the other hand, the nature of official dominance determines that the activities of tribute horse are limited to the upper classes of the Ming and Mongolian dynasties. Although the tribute horse activities between the two sides have the characteristics of high frequency and large scale, the participants are mainly Mongolian tribal chieftains, leaders, and Ming dynasty officials, whcih means the group involved is one-sided. The ordinary people on both sides have not fully participated in them, and the rewards received by Mongolia are mostly occupied by high-level officials, while the horses obtained by the Ming court are either allocated to WeiSuo for riding or used by the royal family, so the benefits to the people are limited. After the "The leader of Mongolian Tartar tribe Anda was ennobled by the Ming court", a comprehensive interactive relationship between Ming and Mongolia was reestablished, and trade between the two sides was no longer limited to the upper echelons, which means the general public could also participate. From this, it can be seen that only the

interaction between the two economic forms of comprehensive opening up is more in line with the historical trend of communication and integration between multiple regions and ethnic groups.

### Funding

Supported by 2023 Nantong University College Student Innovation Training Program Project: From "Tu Ren" to "Scholar-bureaucrat": The Changes in the Image of the Mu Clan in Lijiang in "Mu's Genealogy" (202310304003Z).

### 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.

### Reference

- [1] *Records of Emperor Taizu of Ming Dynasty*. Shanghai: Shanghai Library Press, 2015.
- [2] (Ming) Shen Shixing et al.: "Da Ming Hui Dian". Yangzhou: Guangling Book Company, 2019.
- [3] (Ming) Zhang Xuan: "Record of Hearing and Seeing in the Western Garden" Continuation of the Complete Library of Four Classics, Part 1169 Miscellaneous Classics. Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2002.
- [4] (Ming) Wang Shizhen: "Miscellaneous Works of Yanshan Hall" The Complete Book of the Four Treasures of Jingyin Wen Yuan Ge, Volume 168, Miscellaneous History. Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 2008.
- [5] *Records of Emperor Taizong of Ming Dynasty*. Shanghai: Shanghai Library Press, 2015.
- [6] (Ming) Lin Yaoyu: "Annals of the Ministry of Rites" Jing Yin Wen Yuan Ge Si Ku Quan Shu, Historical Volume 355, Official Category. Taipei: Taiwan Commercial Press, 2008.
- [7] *Records of Emperor Xuanzong of Ming Dynasty*. Shanghai: Shanghai Library Press, 2015.
- [8] Cao Yongnian: "General History of the Mongolian Ethnic Group (Volume 3)". Hohhot: Inner Mongolia University Press, 2002.