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Turkic Kaganate and China by Sources and the Latest Archeological Research

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Abstract

Creation of Turkic state is an important historical process in the history of the modern Turkic peoples of Eurasia. In a short period of time Turkic state reached the peak of power and was involved in the global process of international contacts. Relations with China, Sassanid Persia and the Byzantine Empire were key points in the history of the Turkic Kaganate. The range of relations established between Turkic state and China was very wide. In all diverse connections between two states, including political and diplomatic, military, marital ones, etc., Sogdians played a role of connectors and ambassadors, and took over the duty of arranging caravan trade between Turkic and Chinese people. One of aspects of Chinese-Turkic relations of political-diplomatic nature is conclusion of dynasty marriages. Dynasty marriages related to one of the most interesting aspects of relations between Turkic state and China. Turkic Kagans used to take princesses from Chinese kingdom to wives. Chinese Kingdoms also had their interest in taking princesses from Turkic state as wives. Dynasty marriages became the main instrument of creating political unions between two states.

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1. Introduction

Creation and development of Turkic statehood is one of the occurrences taking a significant place in the global history. Being founded in 552, within a very short period of time it turned out to become the huge state, being recognized by the early medieval empires. Equal level relations that Turkic state established with Byzantium, Iran, China empires represent a serious issue in the history of Turkic state. The range of relations established between Turkic state and China was very wide, covering all sides of life of both countries. The neighboring empires, having established very close relations in political, diplomatically, trade-economical, military and cultural spheres, and made a significant impact on each other influencing the history of statehood development.

The goal of this article is to reflect on some aspects of those diverse relations, on the role played by Sogdian merchants in Turkic-Chinese relations, on conclusion of dynasty marriages and on policy of Kagans, ruling the Turkic Kaganate during its prosperity towards Chinese state (Wei Kingdom, Qi Kingdom) on the grounds of Chinese documents and the latest archeological data

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2. The role of Sogdians by archeological research

Turkic people, inhabiting Altai mountains and being dependent to Zhuzhans, gaining power during the period of ruling of Tumen (Bumyn), the descendent of Ashina, have revolted against Zhuzhans. Since that time, Turkic people, coming up to the arena of history, started to establish relations with the Chinese Western Wei Kingdom. According to documents, trade and economical relations between Turkic and Chinese people have started around 530-40 from trading in the borderline regions (Sungatay, 2006). The main goods of trading was silk.

In all diverse connections between two states, including political and diplomatical, military, marital ones, etc., Sogdians played a role of connectors and ambassadors, and took over the duty of arranging caravan trade between Turkic and Chinese people. Sogdian merchants not only served in this capacity between Turks and China, but also as ambassadors in diplomatic and political issues between Turkic state and Byzantium and Persian empire (Blockley, 1985). Trade on the Silk Way, going via the Turkic state was performed with the help of Sogdians (Kyzlasov, 2004). Turkic people were controlling the Great Silk Way, which was connecting China, Iran and Southern and Northern Siberia. The state controlling this territory was also extending its control over the international trade. In history such advantage was reached only by “Huns and Turkic Kaganate” (Ganiyev, 2006, p. 11). Sogdians, arranging trade at this territory, were providing the Turkic elite with houseware made of precious metals, artistically made weapons, horse harness. In the process of excavation in Altai, Tuva, Mongolia, Tian-Shan (Savinov, 2005) silver jars, houseware made of silver and gold and decorated with precious stones, bronze, gold and silver clasps and buckles, silver rings, stone and glass necklaces, that reached Turkic people as a result of trade with Sogdians were found (Khudyakov, 2004). Kagans of Turkic state – Tumen, Istemi, Taspar and Mukan in their international relations used services of such Sogdians as An-Napanto, Maniakh, Anziyan (later we will mention this Sogdian head of colony in details) An-Sui-ze, Shi-Shihusi, Kan Su-mi, An Tu-khan (Atakhodzhaev, 2011).

One of such memorials is the large burial ground, found occasionally in 2000 in Chanan city, the ancient capital of China, nowadays – Si-an city. The burial ground fits with the period of ruling of Northern Zhou Kingdom (557-581). One of fifteen graves of the burial ground was found to be the grave of Anziya, the head of the Sogdian trade colony. The surface of tombstone depicts diverse spheres of external and internal life of Sogdian colony, pictures of accepting the Turkic ambassadors, pictures of ceremonial reception of the head of colony coming with greetings to the capital of Turkic state, etc. (Sungatay, 2005).

The Sogdian colony, located at the cornerstone of the ancient Chinese capital was under ruling and supervision of Turkic Kaganate. Chinese elite was accepted by the head of the colony only in the form of trade and diplomatic mission (Sungatay, 2005). Sogdian trade colonies, expanding throughout Zhetisu, Eastern Turkistan, Central and Northern China, and Mongolia, were extensively developing the trade and cultural relations along the Great Silk Way. One of them was the Sogdian colony ruled by Anziya in the Tunzhou region (Sungatay, 2005). This was one of the first Sogdian colonies to be created in China. Memorials of Anziya’s grave represent a very valuable material evidence of diverse aspects of historical, political and cultural life of ancient Turkic people, as well as of the trade connections of Chinese, Turkic and Sogdian states.

3. Dynasty marriages

One of aspects of Chinese-Turkic relations of political-diplomatic nature is conclusion of dynasty marriages. Turkic Kagans used to take princesses from Chinese kingdom to wives. There were several specific reasons for arranging those dynasty marriages. Dynasty marriages were arranged with the purpose of establishing friendly commonwealth relations between two states, especially, during the period of foundation of Turkic state, when the Turkic state gained power and started to become a potential threat to China – with purposes of development of peaceful relations caused by Turkic rulers marrying Chinese princesses; also, during the period when China united as a powerful Sui Kingdom and Turkic state became weak due to inner conflicts – with purpose of “adjoining China and searching for protection of a father in law towards the son in law” (Sungatay, 2006, p. 75).

The first dynasty marriage in the history of Turkic state was concluded during the ruling of Tumen, the Turkic Kagan. According to Chinese documents, Turkic people tried to gain the support of Western Wei Kingdom in order to

win over Zhuzhan. Bilateral diplomatic relations started to be formed. In 545 the Sogdian ambassador came to Turks on behalf of China. The fact of sending the ambassador on behalf of China means that back then Chinese rulers believed Turks are suitable power to form a union with (Khudyakov, 2008). As an evidence of successful result of this embassy, next year Tumen sent his ambassador to China with respect and presents. Diplomatic relations formed between Tumen and Western Wei Kingdom were useful for both sides. Friendly relations with Northern nomadic tribes gaining power was giving advantage to China as compared to their competitor Qi Kingdom, and Turkic people were searching for support to win over Zhuzhans. During that period in Central plane region and North of China there were Lian (502-557), Northern Qi (550-577), and Western Wei (535-557) Kingdoms (Kayyrken, 2008, p. 69).

Commonwealth relations between two states were strengthened by dynasty marriages. In 551 Tumen married Chanle, the princess of Wei dynasty (Sungatay, 2006). Dynasty marriage between Wei dynasty and Turkic state gave an opportunity to Turks to obtain military and political support (Khudyakov, 2003). Before Turkic state revolted against Zhuzhans Ven-di, the King of Western Wei Kingdom, having established commonwealth relationship with Zhuzhans, married the daughter of Zhuzhan Kagan and gave him princes of his dynasty as a wife (Zhumaganbetov, 2006). However when after subduing teles Tumen sends ambassadors to Zhuzhan Kagan to marry his daughter, Anahuan, the ruler of Zhuzhan then sent an ambassador to Tumen with an angry answer: “how dare you, being my devoted slave, to say such words to me?” (Sungatay, 2006, p. 121). Zhuzhan Kagan was insulted to give a daughter to the Ruler of state feudatory to himself. However, Zhuzhan Kagan, as compared to Wei King could not timely consider the power of the Turkic state, which was just gaining force. In 552 (Sungatay, 2006, p. 130) Tumen defeated Zhuzhans. One part of Zhuzhans moved towards China, another part – towards West (Zhumagulov, 2009).

Dynasty marriages between Turkic Kagans and Chinese princesses started to continue further. Chinese princesses also obeyed the levirate law according to Turkic traditions. In 580 Yshybara Kagan married the Princess Tsianzin according to levirate, after the death of her husband Taspar Kagan (Kayyrken, 2008). There is no information in documents that a significant role was played by Chinese princesses in the history of culture of Turkic state. Moreover, children, born after dynasty marriages of Chinese princesses were not even let approaching the top administrative positions in the Turkic state (Zhumaganbetov, 2006). Chinese documents mention only one case when the son of Kagan and of Chinese princess took over the Great Throne of the state (Bichurin, 1950). Nevertheless, it is worth drawing examples from some documents regarding the influence of Chinese princesses. For instance, when Zhou Kingdom was replaced by Sui Kingdom (581), Queen Tsianzin, the spouse of Shabolue (Yshybara) Kagan was in a deep grieve because of destruction of her dynasty. In order to seek revenge from Sui Kingdom, she sent Shabolue to war with that kingdom. «Thus, all people of tutzue started a war against Sui, gathering an army of 400 000 people... Wuwei, Tianshui, Andin, Tsichen, Shantsun, and Yanan lands were ripped off by them without leaving any cattle. The King was very angry with this...» (Sungatay, 2006, pp. 69-70). It is obvious, that Yshybara Kagan sent troops to Sui lands not with the only purpose of taking a revenge for the dynasty of princess (Gumilev, 1961) there certainly were other political reasons. However, the fact that Tsianzin was one of the reasons of that war should not be ignored. It is not consistent in itself to start a talk about the influence of Chinese princesses to the Turkic culture. Still, some information is left in documents, that those princesses, while living in Turkic land, in regards of themselves, observed traditions of their own people.

In 1950s in the Ili Kazakh autonomous region of XUAR of PRC the stone sculpture of Turkic Kagan was found. The sculpture, made in the shape of a figure with a crown on the head, and covered with an epitaph in Sogdian language from top to bottom caused a great interest of scholars. Only in 1990s Chinese and Japanese scholars published the results of their joint research of the sculpture. In the process of reading the epitaph it became clear it is dedicated to Niri Kagan, the grandson of Mukan Kagan (Kagan of Turkic state in 553-572) (Sungatay, 2005, pp. 31-35).

One moment, drawing a special attention to this sculpture was published in 2002. That year excavation works were going near the sculpture, so next to it fragments of ceramic housewares and fragments of brick-shaped and duct-shaped fragments were found and sent to expert evaluation. As a result of that it was found that fragments belong to Sui-Tan epoch (V-IX centuries). And if we consider, that the wife of Niri Kagan was the princess from Syan family, it is assumed, that this stone sculpture was made for Chinese-style temple or mausoleum dedicated to Niri Kagan (Sungatay, 2005). So, this news serves as evidence for the ideas stated above.

Dynasty marriages between Turkic state and Chinese Kingdoms were not limited just to unilateral taking Chinese princesses for wives. Chinese Kingdoms also had their interest in taking princesses from Turkic state as wives. Moreover, during the period of Zhou and Qi Kingdoms, their kings were competing between each other to marry Turkic princesses and were sending them cattle as presents to attract their attention. Information is given about such occurrences in Chinese documents. “During that period Zhou dynasty was in conflict with Qi Kingdom, and wars were not ceasing between them for many years. Because of that Zhou dynasty was always uniting with tutzue, and used them as external support. Mukan Kagan gave his consent to arrange an engagement of his daughter with Gaozu (the King of Northern Zhou during the period of 543-578 (Sungatay, 2006, p. 145)). However when this marriage yet did not work out between two states, Qi kingdom also sent ambassadors with proposals to his daughter” (Sungatay, 2006, pp. 124-125). In the end the king of Wei married the daughter of Mukan Kagan. The daughter of Mukan Kagan marrying Gaozu was left in Chinese history with the name of “Princess Ashina”. To bring in Princess Ashina with the ambassadors “movable palace tent with various belongings, and 120 people to provide various services to the princess in the palace” (Sungatay, 2006, p. 148) went with her, and, “ceremonially brought the princess ... when, in 568, the princess arrived, King Gaozu came in front of her and held the ceremony of welcoming. The Princess is nice-looking and modest in her manners, King Gaozu shows her special honors” (Sungatay, 2006, pp. 147-148). The “Wudi’s biography of Princess Ashina” it is reported, that the daughter of Turkic Kagan died in the age of 32 and was buried in Shaolin.

During the ruling of Mukan Kagan (553-572) Turkic state prospered and its military powers reached the peak (Kyzlasov, 1997), so Northern Zhou and Northern Qi kingdoms, being afraid of Turkic military actions, became their feudatories. In order to attract Turkic people to their side, each year they willingly paid taxes and fees, and put all their might to arrange marriages with the dynasty of Kagans.

4. Conclusion

At the early stages relations between Chinese and Turkic states were mostly trading in nature. The role of Central Asian Sogdian merchants was essential in the process of trade relations between two states. Sogdian merchants served as mediators in trade issues and controlled all trade caravans, going via the Silk Way. Many trade colonies ruled by Turkic kagans were founded at the territory of China. Sogdian merchants, not limited to only trade issues, also undertook ambassador missions between Turkic state and other medieval empires.

Dynasty marriages related to one of the most interesting aspects of relations between Turkic state and China. Dynasty marriages became the main instrument of creating political unions between two states. Starting from Tumen Kagan, Turkic Kagans married Chinese princesses and used the support of China to gain strength of their statehood. Turkic state became a vast empire, and even when Chinese kingdoms turned to feudatory state, the process of arranging dynasty marriages did not stop between rulers of states; the only difference was that now Chinese dynasties strived to gain Turkic support by marrying Turkic girls. Even though Chinese princesses that married Turkic Kagans did not make a major influence in the history of Turkic state, some information is left about those Princesses in Chinese documents and archeological materials.

During the period of ruling of Mukan Kagan and Taspar Kagan Chinese Northern Zhou and Northern Qi kingdoms, after fighting with each other, both with the purpose of gaining support from Turkic Kagans became feudatories of Turkic state, paying taxes and fees to it annually. We can state based on documents, that taxes paid by Chinese kingdoms to Turkic state were significant in size.

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