

A Consideration of the Tang dynasty's Governance Policy during Xuanzong Era
for the Northwest Peripheral Region

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Three big events occurred in the Tang's northwest peripheral region in Xuanzong 宣宗 era (A.D.846-869). The first is recovery of three provinces and seven checking stations in Hehuang 河湟 area to the Tang. The second is return of Zhang Yichao 張議潮 of Shazhou to the Tang. The third is rebellion by the Tangut 党項 ethnic. Those progressed during the same period. Those three events have been studied individually. However, I think connection among them should be considered.

This writing looks at how to deal with the above three events by the Tang dynasty in the Xuanzong era, especially in terms of military, economy and traffic sides. Furthermore, it clarifies the Tang dynasty's governance policy for the northwest peripheral region and its circumstances there.

The three provinces and seven checking stations in Hehuang area recovered to the Tang in January in the third year of the Dazhong (849) was an important place for the Tang as foothold to go to the northwest. In the same time, a messenger of Zhang Yichao came from the Shazhou to the Tang and then, negotiation between the Tang dynasty and his administration started. Thus, the Tang got an ideal opportunity to expand to the northwest, while a problem to disturb it had occurred, the rebellion by the Tangut. They threatened not only security of military food transportation, traffic and the Tang's capital city but also the Tang's governance of the recovered Hehuang area and the messenger's travel to the capital city, Chang'an.

Xuanzong inaugurated Bai Minzhong 白敏中 who was his minister as the captain general of punitive force against the Tangut. He successfully subdued them. Actually, the purpose for dispatch of Bai Minzhong was not only the suppression of the Tangut but also restoration of the traffic roads. That was why the Tang built forts at key spots of the traffic and secured the traffic roads.

Next, the Tang began to take its economic policy there. At first, it used merchants and encouraged them to transport military food to the peripheral forts. The merchants were escorted by the forts and those force. Subsequently, Tang fully had a monopoly on the sale of salt lake in the northwest peripheral area. Because the Tang's monopoly system of salt adopted registered salt merchants, its production sites actively lured them. They were also rice merchants. It is possible that the above merchants who transported military food include the salt merchants and they bartered at the forts, Junshi 軍市.

Finally, many people were dispatched to the peripheral area due to construction of new forts, stationing of military force and management of salt lakes. Tang encouraged merchants to travel to fill those people's demand. That must generate huge distribution. I would assume that new market such as Junshi established.