

# **A Probe into the Inevitability of the Battle of Dafeichuan between Tang and Tubo**

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**Abstract:** The historical documents are used to discuss the inevitability of the war between Tang and Tubo, and the important position of Tuyuhun and the political and ethical analysis under the tribute system of the Tang Dynasty, revealing the strategic intention of the Tang Dynasty to send troops to Tuyuhun. Tuyuhun is located on the main route of the Silk Road and is rich in various metals. Along with Longxi, Jincheng, Pingliang and Tianshui counties, Tuyuhun was an important source of Tang Dynasty war horses. If this war is won, it will not only relieve the siege of the four towns in Anxi, but also relieve the strategic pressure in Hexi. Through sorting out the political relations among Tang, Tubo and Tuyuhun, this paper presents the struggle for living space between Tang and Tubo under the cover of political ethics of "rise from the ashes".

As an important part of the Silk Road, Tuyuhun has a unique geographical advantage. It connects with various countries in the Western Regions to the west, Hexi region to the north, Tubo region to the south and Longyou region to the east. It can be called the northwest throat and Guanzhong barrier. In previous studies on the history of communication between Tang Dynasty and Tubo, the Tuyuhun factor has always run through it. Mr. Chen Yinke once discussed the rise and fall of the Tang Dynasty on the basis of the link between the rise and fall of foreigners and the relationship between foreign invasion and internal affairs. His holistic and interrelated methods provided us with research ideas for studying the national relations and the rise and fall of dynasties under the pan-East Asian pattern of the Tang Dynasty. In this process, the great changes in the political structure in the northwest caused by the Dafeichuan War have also affected the entire pan-Northeast Asian structure and the ups and downs of the Tang Dynasty for a century. After Tubo invaded Tuyuhun, the two sides fought in Qinghai Dafeichuan. Whether the Tang Dynasty had the moral obligation of the sovereign state to help it regain its statehood or for other reasons is the focus of this article.

## **1. Tubo's invasion of Tuyuhun is inevitable**

### **1.1 The important position of Tuyuhun**

Tuyuhun was originally a branch of Xianbei in Liaodong. After several passes, it lived between Qing and Gan. It was mainly nomadic. Although it was a county in Sui Dynasty, it was unable to control it. At the beginning of the Tang Dynasty, many rebels were defeated by Li Jing and Hou Junji and formally became vassal states. On the other hand, Tubo was treated as the "foreign states" at the outermost end of the tribute system due to its slow development and limited geographical environment, and its status was far below that of Tuyuhun. As far as marriage is concerned, in the Biography of Tubo in the New Tang Dynasty, Zhanpu sent envoys with money. Under the condition that both Tujue and Tuyuhun could marry, Tubo was rejected because of its economic and military strength, which was not recognized by the Tang Dynasty. Different from Tubo, Tuyuhun lives in Gansu and Qinghai. Its geographical location is very important. It is an important passage connecting the western regions except Hexi. Animal husbandry is developed and it is rich in various metals. It is also an important source of Tang Dynasty war horses along with the four counties of Longxi, Jincheng, Pingliang and Tianshui. After the Tang Dynasty accepted it as a vassal state, it is not only conducive to controlling the western regions far away, but also to relieving the strategic

pressure of Hexi regions. Therefore, much attention has been paid to it.

If the strength of Tubo was not enough to compete with Tuyuhun in the early days, and the two maintained relative peace, then the conflict between the two sides was inevitable as the various ministries consolidated into powerful forces under the unification of the Tubo dynasty and began to walk out of the closed inland plateau and expand their living space. Because of the rapid development within the new nomadic economic regime and the rapid population growth, the grassland and cultivated land per unit area are no longer sufficient to carry the increased livestock and feed the newly increased population. It is the inevitable choice to expand to seek more living space. Tubo is located in the Tibetan Plateau. It is restricted by the natural environment in the east, covered with high mountains and rivers, blocked by the Himalayas in the south, and Pamir Plateau in the west. Tuyuhun in the north has abundant water and grass in the land of Ganqing. It can reach the countries of the Western Regions in the west, and reach Guanzhong through Jincheng and Tianshui in the south through Longshan. Naturally, it is the only choice for its expansion.

## **1.2 The three stages of Tang-Tubo's relations**

Tubo's expansion process did not appear suddenly, but with the gradual increase of the scope of activities of the new nomadic economic regime, the process can be divided into three stages: contact period, contradiction period and stalemate period.

1) Contact period. At this stage, the relationship between the two sides is mainly peaceful. At that time, Tubo had just completed its unification, and its own strength was not strong. Although it had some conflicts with Tuyuhun and Tang Army, it still gave priority to submission to Tang Dynasty. And Princess Wencheng went to Luosa. The relationship between the two was established by their uncles and nephews. The cultural and economic exchanges between the two sides became increasingly frequent. Various advanced production technologies in the Central Plains region also began to spread to Tubo, further promoting the development of Tubo itself. The relationship between Tang and Tubo entered a short honeymoon period. For example, Emperor Taizong attacked Liao Dynasty successful and come back, and Zhanpu "Shiludongzan send a letter of congratulation to the emperor" and praised so much about it. When the Emperor ascended the throne, he said, "Nongzang writes to Changsun Wuji:" When the Emperor ascended the throne at the beginning, if there are disloyal people, I would like to invite my troops to the the Central Plains region and protect the emperor." "The emperor also promoted Tubo Zhanpu to be his son in-law and the king of Xihai Prefecture, giving him 2,000 gifts. At this stage, Tubo was recognized and canonized by the central dynasty and was placed in the whole tributary system, from the "foreign states" to the tributary system.

2) Period of contradiction. With the completion of the internal integration of Tubo and the increase of its strength, the struggle for living space between Tubo and Tuyuhun is once again highlighted. When Emperor Taizong was in power, Tubo was refused a request for marriage. He led the Yangtong to attack Tuyuhun and forced him to retreat to the area north of Qinghai Lake. Later, the Tang Dynasty intervened. During the Gaozong period, with the demand of Tubo's own development and the overlapping of pastoral areas, the two countries harassed each other constantly. After Tubo suffered a crushing defeat and Tuyuhun, Heyuan prince Murong Nuoqubo and Honghua Princess retreated to Liangzhou. There are two places to pay attention to here. One is that Tuyuhun surrendered with Tuyuhun and Minister Suhegui came to Tubo. The other is that the two are at odds and each is presented with its own merits. The Tang Dynasty did not properly handle them. This shows that the internal struggle of Tuyuhun and the failure of Tang Dynasty as the suzerain to mediate effectively in time when the two sides presented each other. Tubo's invasion led directly to Xue Rengui's conquest of 100,000 troops. The Tang Dynasty, in the name of marching on the Luosa Road, had a great intention of attacking Tubo. Helping Tuyuhun, a vassal state, to restore his country seems to have great political and ethical appeal. The emperor also said to the Tubo emissaries: "Tuyuhun and Tubo's nephews and uncles, Suhegui rebelled against his leader, and Tubo let him go. Xue Rengui and others went to capture Murong's family and ambushed it again. They were attacked in Liangzhou. Why? "Pointing directly at Tang Army is to deal with the internal

contradictions of Tuyuhun, not Tubo. Is Tang Army only doing its duty as the sovereign state to arouse the masses? We can see that, after occupying Tuyuhun, in the first year of Xianheng, Tubo quickly sent troops to the western regions, entered the remaining 18 states of Jimi, and forced the Tang Dynasty to abolish the four towns of Anxi. This article believes that this is the fundamental reason that forced the Tang Dynasty to make such a huge response. The Hexi region is long and narrow in terrain, and the loss of the strategic barrier of Tuyuhun will not only put Hexi under great military pressure, but also bring uncertainties to the supply routes leading to the garrison in the western regions. Without the support of strategic materials, the four towns of Anxi will be difficult to support. This is what the Tang Dynasty did not want to see after spending huge sums of money to operate the western regions. Qin Ling also said bluntly to Tang: "Gan and Liang are 2,000 miles away from Jishi Road, which is not hundreds of miles wide and only a hundred miles narrow. If I go out of Zhangye and Yumen, the big country will not plough in spring and not reap in autumn. In five or six years, I will be able to break its right. If you don't do it now, there is no danger to me.", it can be seen that he has clearly seen the scruples of the Tang Dynasty, so he proposed to exchange the Western Regions for stability in Hexi. Thus, the importance of Tuyuhun is self-evident.

3) The stalemate period. During the war in Dafeichuan, Tang Army suffered huge losses, withdrew from Qinghai region, and the Tuyuhun region was completely returned to Tubo. The two sides entered the stage of strategic stalemate. Although there have been repeated since then, they have not returned to the former Tuyuhun region. The former owner Murong Nuoqubo and his cronies Shuqianzhang were relocated to Lingzhou by the Tang Dynasty. The war area was mainly concentrated in the valley area near Qinghai Lake. After the An-Shi Rebellion, the Tang Dynasty took good soldiers from Helong to fight against rebellion. It was only when the defense in Hexi was empty that Tubo broke the deadlock and captured Helong. At its peak, the front line was pushed to the vicinity of the capital circle of the Tang Dynasty.

## **2. The inevitability of sending troops from the Tang Dynasty**

### **2.1 Tang Dynasty Tribute System and Its Political Ethics**

Since the Han and Tang dynasties, although the central plains dynasties have changed and split up several times, the idea of grand unification and the idea of suzerain and vassal state, which were established under the tributary system, remained the mainstream political thought until the Qing dynasty. Grand unification was not only the unification of the country, but also one of the sources of the legitimacy of the political power. The idea of suzerain and vassal state was the ethical morality to maintain the operation of the tributary system. Beginning in the 3rd century BC, the hierarchical political order system with the central plains empire as its main core began to emerge and develop. This "rule of virtue" system with strong Confucian political ethics is based on the strong appeal of its own civilization. It emphasizes that military conquest is only a means, not an end. It is the strength of the empire that the four barbarians are convinced to come to Tang. In specific affairs, the monarch is required to have the boldness of mind to deal with the relations with various subordinate countries and even foreign countries. Compared with the military plunder and colonization when western civilization entered other regions, the tribute system obviously has certain reciprocal and rewarding properties. For example, it is recorded in *Zhenguan Political Leaders* (Volume II, Direct remonstrance [attached]) "Tang is safe enough to serve. It's beyond the reach of the foreigners, and here can try to supply them."

Under this system, the relationship between the central dynasty and its subordinate states is expressed in terms of kinship. For example, Tang and Tubo is a brother-in-law and nephews relation, and Tubo and Tuyuhun are also brother-in-law and nephews relation. During Gaozong period, Tuyuhun's title in the tribute system was lower than Tubo's, and he was a nephews of Tubo. The Tang Dynasty, as a parent, needs to play a role in this system. Therefore, it is reasonable for the Emperor to question the invasion of Tubo. Tubo violates the political ethics in the system and knows that it is not reasonable. Therefore, the emissary can only be say "I was ordered to offer it, it is not heard like that." to prevaricate the emperor.

### 3. The purpose of sending troops from the Tang Dynasty

Mr. Fei Xiaotong proposed the pattern of difference order as the key to peep at the basic social organization structure in China and compared it with the pattern of western organizations. China's rural society is based on patriarchal clan system and has typical Confucian ethics. The relationship between people is corrugated by the distance of kinship. If we compare it with the tributary system vertically, we will find that the tributary system, which has the characteristics of Confucian political ethics, is very similar to the differential order pattern of Confucian family ethics, only pushing it from governing the family to a higher level of governance and diplomacy. In this pattern, the members within the family are sorted by blood relationship from near to far, and thus organize and unite the interior. The same is true at the national level, which is embodied in the triple relationship of 'celestial empire', the vassal state and 'the foreign states'."

From the perspective of the Tang Dynasty, the central dynasty is located within the core circle and is the foundation of the rule. From this point of view, it is the dependency country and the foreign country, which have a clear distinction between the inside and the outside, and take this as the rule of conduct. Yang Wenrong pointed out the difference in thinking between China and the West through the role played by "law" and "propriety" in Chinese society. China has created a highly cohesive but isolated society, which is clearly aware of the internal and external differences and focuses on internal development and social relations. When the vassal states did not affect the core interests of the central dynasty, they were mainly restrained. When the influence began to affect the interests of the dynasty itself, military deterrence to the vassal states or foreign states was indispensable. So, what is the reason why the Tang Dynasty is famous for its dispatching troops? The Emperor Gaozong once said that Tubo, as a great-uncle of Tuyuhun, acted as a rebellious minister and sent "Xue Rengui and others to settle Murong". This not only conforms to the ethics of the tribute system, but also states that this war is not against Tubo, and Tubo's attack on Tang Jun is obviously against the morality of the system. In addition, to this day, Japanese and Korean still retain a proper noun from the Chinese language, the "great honor and birthright", which shows that the adherence of ancient Chinese dynasties to the great honor and birthright often exceeded the realistic interests of countries. The Analects of Confucius Yao said that "Reviving the perished country, succeeding the severed clans, and selecting and using the lost virtuous and talented people of the previous generation, the people of the world will surrender. ""Rise from the ashes" are the core political ethics in the tribute system. If this core political ethics cannot be maintained, how can Tang dynasty trust other subordinate countries? Since it is the duty of the suzerain to help the vassal state to restore its sovereignty, the real strategic purpose of the Tang Dynasty was hidden.

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