



Clients, double clients or brokers? The changing agency of intermediary tribal groups in the Ming empire (1368–1644)

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Abstract

Intermediaries are social agents who can be found in all types of different environments, cultures, and organizations. More often than enough, intermediaries are middlepersons between two power centers, yet their agency is precarious due to their position as brokers who gain from bridging otherwise unconnected parties, or marginalized vulnerable individuals who suffer from the invasion of the neighboring power holders. How can these two different perspectives of the intermediaries be reconciled? Under what conditions do they shift from one type of agency to another? Previous scholarship attributes the agency of intermediaries to static positionality. This paper treats the position of the intermediary as an opportunity structure, which is shaped by multi-level relational dynamics. We show the changing agency of three intermediary tribal groups (i.e. the Tibetans in northwestern China, Uriyangqad Mongols, and Jurchens) who were situated between the sedentary Chinese and nomadic Mongols during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) through a systematic study with horse trade data. The group-based and officially-regulated horse trade constituted the most important linkage between the intermediaries and these two power centers. We study the changes in the dynamics of their contact during trade, and explain why these intermediaries became client, client to two patrons, and broker in their trade with the Chinese and Mongols in different eras. We argue that the position of the intermediaries did not provide definite advantages for their exploitation, nor did it paralyze them with any concrete disadvantages. Rather, their position offered them unpredictable opportunities that arose from their relational dynamics with the power centers. Moreover, the self-serving and local interests of the intermediaries, and the strategies and tactics that they used, determined their capacity to respond to emerging and unpredictable opportunities and capitalize on them.

Keywords Agency horse-trade · China · Empire · Intermediary · Mongols

Intermediaries are social agents who can be found in many different environments, cultures, and organizations. Their agency is often precarious because of their position. Our paper examines the changing agency of intermediaries in inter-imperial politics. In

doing so, we ask a question: why is it that intermediaries can sometimes take advantage of their position, but other times are crippled by their position? In particular, we examine three intermediary groups, i.e., the Tibetans in northwestern China, Uriyangqad Mongols, and Jurchens, who inhabited the frontier zones between China and the Mongols from 1368 to 1644. At the time, China was ruled by the Ming dynasty. The Ming Empire was founded by the Han Chinese who rose in the south to rebel against the Mongol-Yuan Empire.¹ The retreating Mongols retained the Chinese political structure and Kublai Khan even named the dynasty Yuan, yet they continued to internally fracture and formed new states during the studied period. For convenience, we call these states the Mongol power.² The three intermediaries were connected to the two powers through war, trade, coercion, religion, intermarriage and other ties. The intermediaries were dependent on the imperial powers, and the degree of their autonomy was significantly influenced by the interrelationships of two great powers. Although the intermediary groups at times played a role similar to that of a broker, the changes in their agency cannot be predicted by using an extant analysis of brokerage. Therefore, this study aims to determine the conditions that the intermediaries could benefit from their position and the conditions that they would suffer from the precarity inherent in their position.

In other words, instead of assuming that the position of intermediaries offers fixed advantages or disadvantages, we study its changing possibilities for the intermediaries. The three intermediaries are in the in-between space of the agrarian Chinese empire and the nomadic Mongol states. Their lifestyle was a combination of nomadic activities, hunting and agrarian life, which was very different from the Chinese who were typically farmers, and the Mongols who were primarily herders.³ Their existence was however crucial to reduce direct confrontations between the Ming and Mongols, but also contingent on the interrelationship of these two great powers.

¹ The Ming Empire consisted of 13 provinces in China proper and 9 defense areas in its frontiers, and therefore ruled over 6.5 million km² of territory. The Ming Empire reportedly had a population of more than 60 million people in 1393, which was approximately one-fifth of the world population. However, there have been accusations that many of the later figures were severely inflated, as there was supposedly a population of over 100 million or even close to 200 million individuals in 1600. Production and trade in the Ming Empire also contributed to its status as one of the greatest economies in the world at the time; see Twitchett and Mote (1998, p.14).

² The territorial extent of the Mongol Empire is usually considered to stretch from Eastern Europe to East Asia with the rise of Genghis Khan until the collapse of the Yuan Dynasty, which was approximately from 1206 to 1368. During 1259–1294, the Mongol Empire separated into 4 major states, including Golden Horde, Chagatai Khanate, Ilkhanate, and the Yuan Dynasty. The division resulted from a civil war between the descendants of Genghis Khan who considered the Mongol Empire to be jointly shared property among family members. The Yuan Dynasty eventually became the ultimate bearer of the Mongol Empire, and Kublai the Great Khan re-imperialized the other 3 Mongol states within Mongol-dominated China in the late 1200s.

³ Scholars of frontier history (Barfield, 1992; Lattimore, 1940) coined the term ‘inner frontier’ to define and differentiate this space from the outer frontier which is further in distance from the core of the sedentary civilization of China. Geographically, this space was extended from Manchuria in the east to the eastern edges of Xinjiang and Tibet. The terms inner and outer frontiers presuppose a hierarchical structure, in which space is defined based on the geographical and symbolic distance from the imperial center.

The changing agency of the intermediaries is an understudied area in sociology studies on states and empires. The sociology of state formation has predominantly focused on state capacity that is determined by military and fiscal power. Under this context, the intermediaries would then be small in size and have minimal military and fiscal power, which would incapacitate them in state competition. Moreover, the agency of the intermediaries has not been given due attention in the sociology of empire either. The intermediaries were found in the frontier zones of both the Chinese and Mongol powers. They were marginalized by both power centers. Studies on empires focus on how imperial centers influence, subordinate, control, or face resistance from the marginalized (Scott, 1999). The strategic position of the intermediaries and their importance in inter-power competition has been largely understudied and undertheorized. Our study highlights the in-betweenness and the possible relational resources that an intermediary could mobilize to create a favorable position.

To do so, we specifically focus on the horse trade which connected the intermediaries and the two great powers. Horses were important in the era of calvary armies. The Chinese needed a continuous supply of military horses to secure its northern defense against the Mongols, but faced limitations in domestic equine production.⁴ The Ming Empire therefore was dependent on the frontier nomads who supplied them with horses. This industry was a major and steady type of importation for the Ming Empire and the Ming court established special institutions in its inner provinces to herd horses provided by the nomadic groups (Mitsutaka, 1971). Horses were traded for a variety of goods, but most importantly silk, satin and other textiles, which were deficient among the nomads and as a result, were in high demand. Horse trade thus created the most important connection between the nomadic and semi-nomadic people and the agrarian-based Chinese empire (for the locations of the horse markets, see Fig. 1).

Two most important goods flowed in the horse market: horse and tea. The time, duration and size of the market induced great changes in the interrelationships between the Ming state, the Mongol power and the intermediaries. On the one hand, horses provided the nomads (including the Mongols and the intermediaries) leverage over the Ming Empire. On the other hand, the Ming could manipulate its relations with the nomadic groups by encouraging or restricting the horse trade. On the Ming side, closing market might amount to a more efficient way to ward off the Mongols than going to the war. However, the Mongols, craving for tea and other goods, kept raiding the Ming border to force the opening of the markets. When trade was unavailable, they even attempted to seize the market established for other nomadic groups. The conditions under which horse markets were opened or closed, as well as

⁴ The Ming government initially attempted to raise horses through the *Yuanma si* (Pasturage Office) (Rossabi, 1970, pp. 138). However, the pasture land of *Yuanma si* was continuously reduced with the advancement of farming and occupation by local magnates (including governmental officials and powerful landlords). In 1409, the *Yuanma si* had twenty-four pasture areas in the province of Shensi, but by the late 1400s, only six remained. Importation gradually became the major source of supplying military horses.

their impact on the Ming-Mongol relationship offered a good angle to view the rise and fall of the Ming and the various nomadic groups (Serruys, 1967, 1975; Jagchid & van Symons, 1989, pp.24–51; Barfield, 1992). Horse trading was conducted through two major venues: the tributary missions and horse markets.⁵ It was mainly conducted by chieftains who were granted permits to trade with the Ming Chinese, and therefore was state-regulated and primarily group-based, even though individual trade was unavoidable.⁶ As a result, horse trade was sensitive to changes in the political relationships. The changing patterns of the horse trade can be used to reveal the changing agency of the intermediaries.

The power of intermediaries

Intermediaries as weak states

The intermediaries in our analysis were small political units, and therefore inferior to the big states in terms of territorial size, population, and material resources. Historical sociology has long focused on the critical role of large political units by elucidating the dynamics of political changes associated with states (Finer, 1999; Kennedy, 1987; Maier, 2006). The power of a state was largely determined by its territorial and population size, state owned material resources, army size under its command, amount of collected revenue, and charged tariffs (Braddick, 2000; Brewer, 1989; Glete, 2002; Tilly, 1990). Naturally, large states have an advantage over small states. However, a state is not exclusively determined by its size, but by its capacity. Some smaller states manage to develop strong state capacity in spite of the scarcity of their initial material resources. Historical sociologists have provided useful explanations on why some small states have the ability to persevere, develop strong statehood, and even outcompete large states. These discussions facilitate two arguments which will be discussed as follows.

The first argument attributes state capacity to formal institutional building. The formal institutions are those that are responsible for extracting fiscal and military resources (Levi, 1988; Spruyt, 2007; Tilly, 1990; Torres Sánchez, 2007). The power of a state is evaluated by the degree of bureaucratization of its government (Kiser & Baer, 2005), share of taxes of its total revenues (Bonney, 1995; Hoyle, 1994; Schumpeter, 1991), fulfillment of conscription, and ratio of standing army versus hired arms (Büsch, 1997; Downing, 1991; Thomson, 1995; Tilly, 1990). Some smaller states have developed more advanced institutions based on these criteria and flourished (Gennaioli & Voth, 2012). For instance, England in the 17th and 18th centuries was unquestionably a small state without territorial dominance or a sizeable population

⁵ Historians have extensively discussed the importance of tributary trade for the Chinese Empire (see Zhang, 2015; Dreyer, 2015; Wang 2010; Kang, 2010). The non-Chinese states were greatly motivated to participate in tributary trade for various reasons including to acquire trade opportunities; seek Chinese recognition and enhance the authority of local vassals against their opponents; and acquire the protection of China who would ensure local security.

⁶ Smuggling was a perennial problem that also persisted in horse trade. However, no systematic records of private horse trade are available. Our paper mainly focuses on the horse trade officially conducted between the Ming Empire and its various tributary partners.

(Storr, 2008), but not only were they advanced in implementing bureaucracy in the government (Brewer, 1989; Levi, 1988), sustaining property rights (North, 1982), curbing excessive patrimonialism in public governance (Lachmann, 1989), but also reducing the debts of the Crown by capitalizing on the notion of a sovereign bank (Carruthers, 1996). These successful institutional innovations enabled a small state like England to outperform their larger rivals because their state capacity was sustainably enhanced (McNeill, 1992; Tilly, 1990).

The paradigm of a fiscal-military state has been under debate in recent years. Using the notion of a “developmental state”, Pincus and Robinson (2016) called for the examination of how state investment in infrastructural buildings in and beyond the British Isles contributed to English ascendancy. This is associated with a shift in the focus on fiscal-military dominance to civil infrastructure and cultural dynamics. The small state could also develop into a leading power not merely based on its fiscal-military performance, but also because it has more efficient infrastructural power (Mann, 1984). Therefore, the success of the British in becoming a small strong state was partly derived from its civil accomplishments in facilitating an interlocking road system statewide (Guldi, 2012).⁷ The building of infrastructures significantly changed their state capacity with the active participation of “inferior” or local officials who orchestrated the implementation of British social policies related to prison settings, changes in mannerisms, and so on and so forth (Innes, 2009).

The infrastructural power argument can be broadened to include cultural dynamics. The Dutch state in its golden years greatly relied on the political pacts of powerful oligarchs whose collaboration with the sovereign engineered Dutch hegemony in colonization. The privileged corporate groups headed by provincial regents overlapped with the state institutions, especially the administration apparatus, but never attempted to centralize the government (Adams, 2005). The patrimonial structure of a combination of a delegated sovereign authority and entrepreneur elitism extended the infrastructural capacity of the Dutch to other countries which rendered them as a “node” in early modern colonial global networks (Stern, 2015; Ward, 2009). The infrastructural basis of power also has moral underpinnings. In the case of the Dutch, the disciplinary methods of the Protestant sects were compatible with the reforms needed in state administration and social infrastructure (Gorski, 1993; Oestreich, 1982). In the case of Japan, the idea of “honorific individualism” played a similar role in improving moral unification which reduced state-society conflicts (Ikegami, 2005).

These two arguments show that small polities are not necessarily weak in fiscal and military power. They could introduce institutional reforms and infrastructural buildings that would allow them to surpass the traditional large states in generating extractable material resources. They could strengthen nation-building through “disciplinary revolution” and secure the social basis of state power.

These two arguments however are not very helpful in explaining the power of the intermediaries in our study. The three intermediaries were loosely organized by their chieftains. They lacked centralized taxation and military systems that would render them comparable to the Chinese state or the Mongol states. If they ever had leverage

⁷ In a similar light, venal officialdom represented what Lachman called “vertical absolutism” to find fiscal resources for the Crown (Lachmann & Adams, 1988; Doyle, 1986, pp.113–150).

over the two imperial powers, it was never due to their institutional and infrastructural advantages. From the perspective of criteria for state capacity, they were undoubtedly weak and negligible, which, however, did not make them any less important in imperial power competition. Therefore, the fiscal-military framework must be transcended to discuss the source of the power of the intermediaries in this study.

Intermediaries in imperial politics

The intermediaries were small in size and weak in political organization. It is however worth noting that they were not only small and weak, but also their position posed problems too. Sandwiched between great powers, the intermediaries would have had to endure the transgressions of the great powers. They were often caught between the power centers, even though the great powers could not wholly dispense of them. In a certain sense, the intermediaries were marginalized by both imperial power centers and struggled to survive their encroachment. In fact, the uni-centered perspective on empires often treats intermediaries as imperial frontiers. They were influenced by changes in the imperial power centers, even though they also resisted the centrally-imposed control when necessary (Doyle, 1986; Steinmetz, 2014, p.80; Wirth, 1997).

The intermediaries, apparently weak and disadvantaged, nevertheless did have the potential of transforming their in-betweenness into an advantageous position. This has been discussed in some of the empire studies, even though there is a lack of systematic related analyses. Historical studies have shown that the edges of great empires often saw the burgeoning of competitive powers. For example, the first Islamic polity, which grew as an intermediary power, took root at the edges of empires, developing in a space close enough to the centers of the Roman/Byzantine and Sassanian powers to learn their techniques of rule and management, but distant enough to be able to constitute a political community of the faithful (Burbank & Cooper, 2011, p.70). Being on the edge of empires not only facilitates the transmission and imitation of cultures, but also enhances heterodox thoughts and practices that would slowly coalesce and evolve into competitive power. Another example is the Ottoman Empire. The founder of the Osmanli (Turkish) dynasty, Osman I, started his empire in the province of Bithynia in central northern Turkey. Bithynia is a landlocked province located south of the Sea of Marmara and not so central to be a concern to the Byzantines, who at the time were part of the Roman Empire. Osman I and his descendants incorporated the Greek and Latin civic cultures, Christian, Muslim, Jewish and other religious institutions, the Byzantine vassalage as well as Arabian military and administrative procedures. They adopted the notion of a supreme leader from their Eurasian predecessors, which is known as the khan (Burbank & Cooper, 2011, p.129).

These examples show that intermediaries occupied the edges of empires, which were not just frontiers that were any less subjected to the power of the centers, but interstices between empires where different cultures intermingled, which was an important factor for the rise of the intermediaries who excelled in innovating political rule. The intermediaries were initially lacking in economic and military resources, but absorbed the different cultures and techniques to develop resources that eventually allowed them to surpass the previous great powers. They somewhat resembled brokers who reap the advantages of heterogeneity in the corporate world.

That being said, the intermediaries who were living between empires were not always able to capitalize on this advantage. They were constantly suppressed by the great powers and at risk of losing their position. History provides many such examples. Before the Qing and Russian imperial borders were settled in 1689, the Zunghars who were a nomadic tribe in the west of China had autonomy of movement and freedom to ally with both imperial powers. Then the Treaty of Nerchinsk was established in 1689 to secure the border between China and Russia. The rulers of both empires agreed that their people should own tribute to the power on their side of the line. This defined boundary reduced any hope of the Zunghars to escape the control of the Qing empire, but was enough for the Qing rulers to suppress and subordinate them. The boundary was further reinforced by the Treat of Kiakhtha signed in 1727. When the Zunghar chief Galdan Tseren (1727–45) attempted the classic tactic of seeking support from a rival of the Qing; that is, the Russian empire, he was ultimately rejected (Burbank & Cooper, 2011; Perdue, 2005). This shows that when the great powers agree to fix their territorial boundaries, the in-between space is greatly reduced, which was detrimental to the existence of the intermediaries.

Another good example is the annihilation of the middle ground in White (1991), who explained that the middle ground was the creation that incorporated different elements of the groups in contact. The French made great headway in their exploration of North America, and created extensive alliances with the tribal chiefs to the west of the Missouri River. They were more adept than the British colonialists in using cultural practices to accommodate the local rule. However, both colonial powers adeptly created middle grounds. However, the American Revolution sabotaged the opportunity for a middle ground and the natives lost their bargaining power with the great powers (Reed, 2019).

The intermediaries between empires therefore occupied a position that at times gave them the opportunity to absorb different cultures and innovate in political rule, but their in-betweenness was rather precarious, as it was contingent on the shifts in the competition between the great powers. How would this account for their changing agency? Historical studies have provided examples of the success or failure of the intermediaries, but do not give a comprehensive analysis of the factors that facilitated their rise or demise. Other than the benefits of heterogeneity, there is the need for a thorough and dynamic analysis on the power of intermediaries.

Small-states and diplomatic resources

To answer the research question of identifying the conditions that the intermediaries could most effectively take advantage of their position, we find that the literature on small states in international relations provide some illuminating discussions.

In international studies, small states are those that are secondary to the large states in size as well as economic and military power. The interest in small states has increased in the post-World War II era. Unlike the intermediaries in this study, small states are not necessarily geographically in proximity to the great powers. While small states are not the dominant core powers in the international system (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 2016), they are also not entirely passively dependent on the great powers for protection. The realist school tends to emphasize the subordinate status of the small states in the international arena, where the large states exert predominant influence due to their

population size, resources, and prestige. The small states cannot significantly affect the struggle for power between the great powers and therefore have to strive for survival in a space carved out by the great powers (Vital, 2006).

The neoliberalist and constructivist theorists on the other hand argue that smallness does not equate to weakness. The small states can mobilize other resources to enhance their status in international relations. They might have some strategic resources (such as oil in the Middle East countries and some of the central Asian countries (Cooley, 2012)) and control critical passageways (e.g. Singapore is located on the crossroads between the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea). They might also effectively exploit the conflicts of the big powers for their own benefits (Han, 2017), even though the balancing strategies (often centered on increasing the country's armaments or seeking allies) can turn out to be self-defeating (Chan, 2012, p. 18).

Moreover, small states could develop rich soft power (not the ability to coerce, but to motivate others to want what they desire through attraction (see Melissen [2005] on public diplomacy) or seduction (see Nye Jr., 2004), and take an active leadership role in enacting and safeguarding certain normative orders. For example, the small states are considered to be more detached and peaceful than the great powers due to their size, and more vigilant of potential conflicts (Chong, 2010, p.387). They can actively pursue the role of "norm entrepreneurs", by organizing individuals, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), and promoting ideas, all of which have little to do with its size. Small states can also act as mediators and peacemakers (Kleiboer, 1996; Long, 2017; Waage, 2007). Scandinavian countries are good examples. Although they do not have great fiscal and military power, they are rich in normative and discursive power and play an active role in conflict resolution and environment protection.

The intermediaries in this study cannot be compared to the small states in international studies. They were not well-shaped states with fixed boundaries, nor were they recognized and protected by international law. They were more precarious and flexible, and could flourish or vanish, depending on the complexity of the geopolitical situation. However, their presence between the great powers makes them comparable to small states. The three intermediaries in this study owned military horses, which were strategic goods desired by the Ming Empire. They were indispensable trade partners of the Ming dynasty, especially in the early stages of the regime. It could be said that their strategic goods increased their importance in the power struggle between the Chinese and Mongols.

At the cultural level, however, the intermediaries were overshadowed by their neighboring imperial powers. They incorporated both the steppe nomadic culture and the Chinese state culture, but were peripheral to both cultures. They participated in the tribute system of the Ming Empire and were given status, honor, and rank based on their cultural similarity with the Chinese. On the other hand, they were half nomadic people; more like an outsider who adapted to the normative orders of the Mongols and Chinese than an initiator and promotor of a new normative order. The normative resources that they could mobilize were also rather limited.

In addition to the ownership of strategic goods, flexible maneuvering between powers, and the advantage of absorbing different cultures and techniques, the core of the power of intermediaries in our analysis was the relational resources that they could

mobilize. The intermediaries were positioned between two great powers, and fundamental to them for different reasons. The extent that the intermediaries could increase their importance in the competition between the great powers is crucial not just for their own survival but also enhancing their own power. The significance of the intermediaries depends on their strategic goods or their resourcefulness to the great powers. However, their significance fluctuated with changes in the interrelationship of the great powers and their own expectations. This therefore dictated the changing agency of the intermediaries.

In analyzing how these intermediaries mobilized relational resources and why some successfully empowered themselves while others did not, we focus on three factors: 1) the interrelationship of the two great powers (i.e. whether they were highly antagonistic with a power imbalance, or they were highly antagonistic with a power balance, or they showed little antagonism with a power balance), which profoundly shaped the role of the intermediaries in the power struggle; 2) the relationship of the intermediaries with the two imperial powers, which was dependent on the differences in power of the two imperial powers, their respective expansion or contraction of power, and the status of their interrelationship, as well as the distance of the intermediaries from the center of imperial confrontation; and 3) the tactics used by intermediaries to adjust to, consolidate, and even change their position in the web of relational powers.

This analytical framework benefits from the relational models used in international studies on small states. It is argued that the small states, although incapable of becoming an influential actor in a power struggle, can effectively use diplomacy to achieve some of their goals (Rothstein, 1966). Although small states quite often choose to align with the great powers for their survival, their autonomy greatly varies with the changes in the interrelationships of the great powers. In a hegemonic system prevailed by one superpower, small states usually have little choice but to align with the superpower. In a bipolar system, however, small states have more room for negotiation. They can choose to maintain a certain degree of uncertain loyalty and non-alignment: “The unaligned small powers require the presence of both antagonists in order to retain their maneuverability” (Rothstein, 1966, p.403). Nevertheless, small states would lose this flexibility when the great powers are engaged in overt war or initiate alliances. Also, non-alignment would be unviable when the great powers compromise and seek the support of other great powers, with little regard for the inferiors (Rothstein, 1966, p.405). In other words, intense confrontation between great powers could serve the interest of small states who seek flexibility. When a bipolar system is not viable, the small powers become increasingly reduced in significance in terms of security. The reduction of tension between great powers is therefore not entirely beneficial to the small powers.

Fox (1959) also pointed out that small states (in particular, Turkey, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Spain during the Second World War) are not passive pawns in the competition among the great powers. They could control crucial passageways and strategic natural resources to force the great powers to make concessions. They could also appeal to world opinion, operating from a “rectitude base” (Fox, 1959, p.3). Most importantly, the small states could effectively use diplomacy and other means to gain support. That is to say, the small states could mobilize relational resources. Fox (1959) pointed out that peace among the great powers would not be a good situation for the small states. In peaceful times, whether small states face possible invasion of the great

powers largely depends on the unwillingness or disinterest of the latter to “fritter away its strength” (Fox 1968, p.3). Yet in times of war among the great powers, the diplomacy of the small states could be used to their advantage because they are important to the struggle among the great powers. Like Rothstein (1966), Fox (1959) pointed out that the agency of small states is highly contingent on the interrelationship of the great powers.

Inspired by these discussions, our study analyzes the conditions under which the intermediaries—overshadowed by the Ming Chinese and Mongols in size, economy, culture and military power—became clients of these two imperial powers, or completely merged with them, or were neglected by them, or became a powerful broker who eventually outcompeted the two empires. Like the small states, the intermediaries showed different capacity to mobilize relational resources (we do not use the word diplomacy here because the intermediaries were not bound to an inter-state system) to their own advantage. When the Chinese and the Mongol empires were highly antagonistic to each other with a power imbalance, highly antagonistic to each other with a power balance, or showed little antagonism with a power balance, the flexibility of the intermediaries shifted accordingly. They tried to appeal to one imperial patron, or both of them, or greatly differentiated from them (see Table 2). When analyzing the changing agency of the intermediaries, we adopt a processual perspective. Their different fates of rise towards power, or descent towards irrelevance or demise will be discussed.

Method and data

We systematically collected data on horse trade and Mongol campaigns for this study. We delineated the trade patterns based on data on horse trade that was carried out in tribute missions and from the horse markets. We extracted primitive data of the frequency and size of the horse trade from important secondary works, including but not limited to Serruys (1967), Hou (1938), Bao (1998), Wada (1984), and Watanabe (1975), supplemented by the data collected from the database of Ming historical sources created by the Academia Sinica in Taiwan. We used a few key words, including *ma shi* (horse markets), and *gong ma* (tributary horses) to do a systematic search, compared the results, and filtered out the irrelevant information. The key historical sources in the database are *Ming Shi Lu* (The Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty, henceforth MSL, housed at the National Beiping Library (microfilm),⁸ *Ming Shi* (The History of Ming, henceforth MS, housed at the Wuying Dian, compiled by Zhang et al. (1980), and reprinted by the Dingwen Shuju (Dingwen Book Company) in 1980), *Huang Ming Jingshi Wenbian* (Collected Writings on Statecraft in the Ming Dynasty, henceforth HMJSWB, compiled by Chen et al. (1962), and reprinted by the Zhonghua Shuju (Zhonghua Book Company) in 1962). The results of the research

⁸ The MSL provides the most important historical sources of the Ming. It is divided by the reigns of different Ming emperors and all historical events are compiled chronologically for each imperial reign. So when we cite the MSL, the format will be MSL followed by abbreviations of imperial titles and then the volume number and page number. Following the convention of historical scholarship, we add the year between the volume and page numbers. For example, MSL-Hongwu, 84 (1408), p.1117 cites a passage on page 1117 of Volume 84 in the MSL compiled for the time during the reign of Hongwu Emperor, the first Ming Emperor.

work were systematically compared with the secondary sources to verify the validity of the numbers. These primary sources highlighted a few errors in years and numbers in the primitive data that we collected from the secondary sources. From these primary sources, we drew the patterns of trade in three periods of time, which are shown in the three appendices of this article.⁹

We also systematically collected and verified the data on the Mongol military campaigns between the years 1425 and 1551. These campaigns show the frequency and routes of the westward and eastward campaigns launched by the Mongols. They were triggered by the internal reorganization of Mongol power, and had a great impact on the original trade system instituted between the Ming Empire and the three intermediaries. These data sources help to identify the linkage between the reshuffling of the Mongol power and the changes in the horse trade patterns. To reduce the volume of detailed historical information, we provide the entries of such information in the MSL in the footnotes. In analyzing the relations between the intermediaries and the two imperial powers, we extensively used the primary data in the MSL, MS, and HMJSWB. A regrettable limitation in the data is that no systematic records of trade can be found in the Mongolian language, and a Sino-centric perspective is therefore inevitable. However, we teased out the sources to show that the Ming trade policies did not emerge from an omnipotent view, but often were reactions to the unexpected power reshuffling of the nomads.

We applied the data to divide the history of the Ming dynasty into three eras (see the three appendices). In the first era, the Ming Empire built extensive trading connections with a variety of partners (including the three intermediaries) while denying the access of the Mongols to trade. In the second era, the Mongols became the major horse suppliers to the Ming Empire, but their trading activities fluctuated, while the earlier trade partners of the Ming Empire became less and less prominent in horse trade. In the third era, the Mongols became the dominant and consistent horse suppliers. Horse trading was conducted through regular horse markets. Horse trading lost its significance for the other trade partners. The shifts in trade patterns roughly corresponded to the key events that signaled critical imperial changes. Therefore, the first era started in 1368 and ended in 1424, which is coincidental with the end of the reign of the Yongle Emperor. The Ming dynasty shifted from a forward frontier policy after the death of the Yongle Emperor to a more defensive role as they moved into the second period when the Mongols became more active. The year 1550 marked the end of the second era because in 1551, Altan Khan, the leader of the Tümed Mongols, was granted the horse markets for trading. Between 1425 and 1550, the Mongols conducted trade sporadically with the Ming Empire. Their tribute missions brought in a significant amount of horses into China, but they were not given regular markets for selling horses. Regular horse markets for the Mongols were established in 1551. Although the markets were soon abolished, they were reinstated in 1571 and subsequently enjoyed stability. Therefore,

⁹ It should be noted that these numbers are not continuous nor complete. Some years lack numbers, but this does not mean there is no horse trade. For example, it was routine for the Jurchens who held permits to contribute horses to the imperial court on an annual basis. Their visits to the imperial court were not recorded consecutively. It is not clear whether they did not visit the court in those years or simply because their visits became too routine and were not worth being recorded. However, from the numbers, we can identify major changes in the horse trade trends, even though we cannot confirm whether the numbers are accurate.

1550 marks the end of the second era, because after that, the Ming Chinese and Mongols traded peacefully.

Following this periodization, we will first analyze the reasons and timing associated with the changing interrelationships of the Ming and Mongol empires. The sequentially emerging interrelationships show three types of interactions between the two great powers: highly antagonistic interaction with a power imbalance, highly antagonistic interaction with a power balance, or little antagonistic interaction with a power balance. They result in different opportunity structures for the activities of the three intermediaries. Then, we will analyze the changing agency of the three intermediaries conditioned by these opportunity structures.

The Ming-Mongol relational dynamics

The interrelationships of the Ming Chinese and Mongols changed from absolute war, to war and trade, and then prevalent trade in the three eras. The modes of interaction between the two empires profoundly shaped the possible relational resources that the intermediaries mobilized. The three intermediary groups in this study are not naturally enabled or inhibited by their position (see Burt, 1977 for the relationship between position and power; Laumann & Pappi, 1976; Galaskiewicz, 1979). For that reason, we consider in-betweenness not just as a location, but more an opportunity structure, which produced volatile rather than more stable opportunities (Gamson & David, 1996; Meyer, 2004) in exchange for the efforts of the intermediaries.

In the first era, the Ming armies expelled the Mongol troops from the interior provinces of China and adopted a forward policy to counter the Mongols. The Ming armies and the remaining imperial forces of the Mongols were intensely antagonistic. In addition to demonstrating their military strength, the Ming court also performed cultural legitimacy. They recruited Mongol officials, patronized Tibet Buddhism, and used a variety of other means to enhance their image among the nomadic and semi-nomadic people, so that it appeared plausible that the Mandate of Heaven had been transferred from the Mongols to the Chinese (Robinson, 2013, p.5, p.16). The Ming court feared that the Mongols who previously held the throne would attempt to reinstate their rule if given the opportunity.¹⁰ In response to the forward policy of the Ming Chinese, the Mongols not only retreated, but also dispersed to the northern steppe. They retained a nominal allegiance to the old Mongol Empire. In the northern frontiers, the Ming Empire exercised substantial hegemonic influence.¹¹ We define this relationship as one that is *highly antagonistic with a power imbalance*.

In this context, the Ming Chinese rejected the Mongols as a trade partner even though they were the primary horse breeders. Based on the number of tributary horse trades between the Ming Chinese and their northern partners (see Appendix Table 3), it is evident that the Mongols were almost excluded from trade with the

¹⁰ Barfield (1992, p.233) noted that this concern was raised because the Chinese had a penchant for following the “legitimate” line of royal power.

¹¹ The campaigns launched by the early Ming in the 1370s not only aimed to defeat the Mongols, but also establish Ming China as the heir to the entire Mongol political tradition, in the steppe as well as in the interior land of China (see Dreyer, 1995; Waldron, 1995).

Ming Chinese prior to 1408.¹² Because the Ming court's control beyond the Ming borders was very precarious, it created allies to secure its influence beyond the borders (Robinson, 2020, p. 164). Therefore, the court collaborated with the intermediaries in horse trade to contain the Mongols. It will be discussed later that all three intermediaries had little contact with the Mongols, but buffered the threat of the Mongols from the Ming Chinese. Therefore, they aligned themselves as clients of the Ming Chinese.

In the second era, the Mongols moved southwards to occupy the southern steppe of Mongolia after they were reunified under two competing chieftains. They led numerous expeditions to seek trade opportunities. This pressured the Ming Emperor to grant tributary rights to select Mongol chieftains and allowed them to trade horses with the Ming Empire. When the Mongols became disgruntled with the trading imbalance, they resorted to relentlessly plundering the Ming border garrisons. This period was therefore characterized by war mixed with trade. For most of the time, the Ming Empire fought against the Mongols, but also made some concessions on horse trade. Appendix Table 4 lists the details on the tribute missions of the Mongols who provided the majority of the horses to the Ming state; the availability of horses from the Mongols led to the reduction in the number of horses obtained from other sources.¹³ The records show that the frequency of Mongol tribute missions was between 1411 and 1455 on a near annual basis.¹⁴ We label the relationship between the Mongols and Chinese during this period of time as one that is *highly antagonistic with a power balance*.¹⁵

In this period, the intermediaries were no longer obedient clients of the Ming state. On the one hand, they continued to trade horses with the Ming Empire to acquire their desired goods. On the other hand, they became more intimate with the Mongols, who approached or attacked them, and traded and made secret deals with them. They were the buffers of the Ming Chinese, but sometimes also bridged the Mongols and the Ming Chinese as a result of their contact with both groups. The three intermediaries were more or less the clients of two patrons. Like the small

¹² MSL-Hongwu, 84 (1408), p.1117. The chieftain of Oirats, Mahmūd, led a tribute mission to the Ming court. However, we do not know the specific number of horses that he brought. A variety of tributary states and groups supplied horses to the Ming state in this period (for a detailed analysis see Wang & Tian, [forthcoming](#)).

¹³ Appendix 2 shows that the frequency of horse trading and number of horses traded with Korea sharply declined after 1427, and with Central Asia after 1455. The horse transactions with the Tibetans sharply declined and became significantly less frequent after 1450. There is little information about the horse trade with the Jurchens and the Uriyangqad Mongols. We find a few entries on the activities of these horse markets in the northeast in the MSL. However, there are no specifics on the number of horses transacted in the horse markets in the northeast after 1425. The sources however indicate that these markets were still in operation, perhaps subjected to the occasional interruptions.

¹⁴ Prior to 1434, the Tartar Mongols led by Arughtai were the major carriers of tribute missions, but replaced by the Oirat Mongols after 1434. This shows that the eastern Mongols gradually fell out of favor, and were replaced by the western Mongols. However, Mongol tribute missions became sporadic after 1455, and almost nonexistent between 1488 and 1550, which we will explain later.

¹⁵ The shift in the relational pattern is attributed to multiple reasons. First, the Ming court became less inclined to pursue a forward frontier policy and maintained their forces within their borders after the death of the Yongle Emperor in 1424. They suffered from the plundering of the Mongols which forced the Ming state to commence trade with the Mongols. The Mongols were unsatisfied with the trade opportunities offered by the Ming court and frequently launched military campaigns to for the Ming Chinese to open more trade markets and secure better trade arrangements. The Mongols also faced the risk of internal fracturing and internal feuds. As a result, war never ceased between the Ming Chinese and the Mongols from 1409 to 1455.

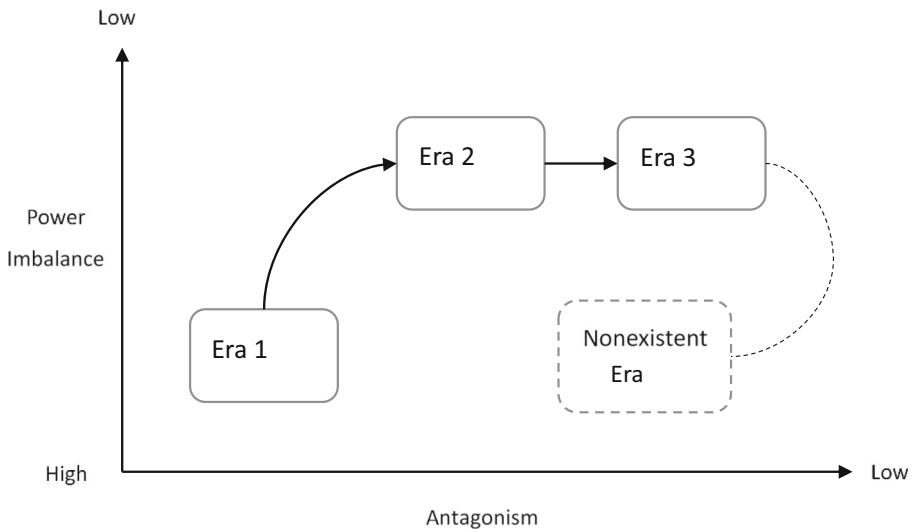


Fig. 1 The changing power dynamics between Chinese and the Mongols

states that struggle in a bipolar system, they had space to maneuver between the great powers more than ever before.

The third era started with the opening of the horse markets and regularization of the trade between the Ming Chinese and Mongols. The Mongols no longer traded with the Ming Chinese through tribute missions, but through stable markets. After the late fifteenth century, the eastern Mongols rose and reunified under Batü Möngke. In the mid-sixteenth century, the grandson of Batü Möngke, Altan Khan, led the right-wing tribes and made some requests for direct trade with the Ming Chinese.¹⁶ The Ming Chinese-Mongol trade issue was eventually settled in 1571, and with the institutionalization of the horse market, their hostility subsequently subsided, even though skirmishes and conflicts persisted. We therefore label this relationship as one that *is low in antagonism with a power balance*.¹⁷

¹⁶ For example, see MSL-Jiajing, 354 (1549), p.6383. In 1549, the Mongols asked for horse trade at Xuanfu and attacked the garrisons in Xuanfu and Datong. In the same year, the Uriyangqad Mongols led an attack with the Mongols on Liaodong and Shahe bao, see MSL-Jiajing, 360 (1550), p.6438. Altan Khan led the right-wing Mongols in crossing the garrisons in Jizhen to request for trade.

¹⁷ The shift can be accounted by some of the internal causes of the Ming and Mongol empires. A few events produced opportunities for peace between the Ming Chinese and Mongols. One of them took place after Altan Khan had led six expeditions into the northwest and secured his power over the Oirat remnants. Altan Khan then secured leadership among the western and eastern Mongols. In other words, the Mongols came together during this period of time. The second event was the restructuring of the Ming officialdom, which led to the rise of practical minded officials, such as Wang Chonggu (1515–1588), Gao Gong (1513–1578), and Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582), who considered normalizing trade with the Mongols beneficial to the stability of the Ming state. Finally, a minor incident preceded this change. One of the grandsons of Altan Khan betrayed him out of spite due to a family dispute, and sought support from the Ming frontier commanders. The Ming government promptly reacted and pressed Altan Khan to hand over Chinese defectors who were fleeing into Mongolia, and as a reward, promised to open the horse markets for the Mongols (see Hou, 1938 for details). The horse markets were opened near the garrison towns of Datong, Xuanfu, Shanxi, Yansui, Ningxia, and Gansu (see Fig. 1 for the locations of the horse markets).

Regularizing trade between the Ming Chinese and Mongols reduced their enmity and greatly reduced the Mongol threat. Appendix Table 5 shows that the Mongols continued to be the major horse provider of the Ming state from 1551 to 1644, but trade was conducted mainly through markets and not tributes. Trade therefore became regular and more frequent. As the Mongols acquired the markets to trade horses for textile and other needed goods, they became less motivated to raid the Ming China border. The military threat of the Mongols therefore declined, even though the financing of the horse trade became a new problem.¹⁸ In this new situation, the importance of the intermediaries as a go-between who served the interests of both patrons greatly increased. The reliance of the Ming state on the intermediaries as buffers was reduced, and the preference of the Mongols for the intermediaries to act as a bridge also waned. This was a period that saw the radical differentiation of the intermediaries. The Tibetans in northwestern China became largely irrelevant, the Uriyangqad Mongols assimilated with the Mongols, and the Jurchens endeavored to become a real power broker as a new patron who competed with the Chinese and the Mongol empires.

The following analysis therefore clarifies the fate of the three intermediaries and their changing agency. The different interactive modes between the two great powers generate different opportunity structures for the intermediaries. However, these opportunities were not derived from macro-structural processes (McAdam, 1982; McAdam et al., 1996; McAdam et al., 2001; Goodwin, 2012;), exogenous to the practices of the intermediaries. The intermediaries are not generally advantaged or disadvantaged by the context effects of Ming-Mongol interaction, which is most clearly seen in the differentiation of the intermediaries in the third era.

Three intermediary groups

The Tibetans in northwestern China: Descent into irrelevance

Era 1

One of the intermediaries were the Tibetans in northwest China, who lived on the Gansu-Tibet border. During the Ming dynasty, Gansu was governed by a garrison system rather than through civilian administration. The Gansu-Tibet

¹⁸ Although the Ming court devised multiple means to cover the costs of horse trading with the Mongols, the magnitude of the expenses continued to increase. In 1575, a minister called Fang Fengshi petitioned to the emperor to restrict the number of horses transacted in Xuanfu to 18,000. However, the horses transacted in Xuanfu exceeded 40,000 per year by 1578. The increase in the number of horse transactions would have eventually reached a threshold that was no longer affordable to the Ming Chinese, which might have compelled them to restrict trade with the Mongols, and might again provoke war with the Mongols. That is to say, a financial crisis might again breach the peace pact between the Mongols and Ming Chinese, and thus they would revert back to their old ways, which fortunately, did not happen because before a full scale financial crisis could take place, the Jurchens had matured into a regime competitor who eventually ousted the Ming state and established the Qing Empire (1644–1911).

border included the southwestern part of modern Gansu and the northeastern part of the current Qinghai province (formerly known as Amdo). There was a mix of nomadism, agriculture and hunting carried out in this area. Since Medieval China, the Tibetans have traded pastoral products, herbs and furs with merchants from inland China for other daily life necessities and luxuries. Tea was central to the trade.

After the Ming armies ended the rule of the Mongol-Yuan empire in this region, they allowed the local chieftains who submitted to them to remain, most of whom were Tibetans, and reappointed them into low-ranking garrison officer corps. The formal authority of the Ming rulers over this region was managed by four major garrisons: the Hezhou, Taozhou, Minzhou and Xining garrisons. The Ming state delegated the supervision of over a hundred local garrisons to these four garrisons. Together, they guarded the borders of Ming China from the southwestern edge of current Gansu west to the territory that lies east of Koko Nor Lake (Qinghai Lake; *qing hai hu*) in contemporary Qinghai. The Tibetan tribes who lived on the Gansu-Tibet border were relatively independent from the dpon-chen (great administrator) regime of the Tibet proper, but critical to the strategy used by the Ming state to corner the Mongols, because the north and northwestern regions of the border abutted the western region of the steppe and were vulnerable to attacks by the nomads.

In the first era, the two imperial powers were in a relationship marked by *strong antagonism and power imbalance*. The Ming state nearly became a hegemonic power in the north. They actively prevented contact between the intermediary groups and the Mongols,¹⁹ and pursued tributary trade relations with Central Asia, Korea, and the intermediary groups to acquire military horses for wars, and strategically isolate the Mongols (see the distribution of horse trade in Appendix Table 3). In 1372, the Ming armies defeated the remnants of the Yuan forces in Gansu and the emperor enforced an aggressive military policy in the northwest. At approximately the same time, tea-horse markets were launched for the Northwest Tibetans, basically to secure their loyalty. The Tibetans were one of the major horse providers to the Ming, and strategically important to the policy of the Ming Chinese to contain the Mongols. The Ming court received approximately 13,800 horses each year from the Tibetans, which far exceeded those from the other two intermediaries, the Uriyangqad Mongols and Jurchens.²⁰

The Tibetans in northwestern China adopted the tactic of alignment in the first era. They were clients of the Ming court. They depended on the Ming state to acquire a strategic good, i.e. tea, which was indispensable in their life for both

¹⁹ This was rightly pointed out by Wada (1984) in his landmark study on the Ming Chinese campaigns to Mongolia during the reigns of the first two emperors. According to his study on the early strategies of the Ming state for the northern frontier, especially his insights into the campaign routes, the best Ming armies were placed to frustrate the intersections among the Mongols and the Tibetans, the Jurchens and the Uriyangqad and not to outright attack the Mongols (Wada, 1984, p.87).

²⁰ Forty-one plates were issued in 1393 to the enlisted Tibetan tribes. The Tibetans who resided in Hezhou had 21 plates for which 7705 horses were expected. The Xining Tibetans were assigned 16 plates to provide 3050 horses. The same horse quota was assigned to the Tibetans in Taizhou who only received 4 plates, see MS: 1948. Yang (2001, p.77) quoted a smaller quota of 3296 for the Xining Tibetans.

daily use (tea leaves were also a source of nutrition in their mineral deficient diet) and religious purposes. Trading opportunities engendered instrumental compliance of the Tibetans in northwestern China (on instrumental compliance in agency problem, see Kiser & Schneider, 1994; Kiser, 1999; Kiser & Baer, 2005; Kiser & Kane, 2007).

Moreover, the Ming government implemented quasi-bureaucratic regulations around trade. They dictated the locations of the tea-horse markets to the Tibetans, which were near the Ming garrison towns and closely supervised by the tea-horse trade bureaus. The Tibetan tribes who were permitted to trade horses for tea were granted golden plates as trading licenses. The tribal chieftains sent in horses only to government agents with plates that matched theirs.²¹ In addition, the state stipulated the horse quota for each enlisted tribe as well as the amount of tea to pay for the horses.

Finally, the patron-client relationship was consolidated through cultural practices. The horse trade was operated on the basis of the recognition of the tributary status of the clients, which indicated that they were part of the Ming state system.²² That is to say, the Tibetans in northwestern China participated the normative imperial order promoted by the Ming state. The Ming Empire appointed the Tibetan chieftains as garrison (*wei suo*) officers on the Gansu-Tibet border. These chieftain families held hereditary garrison positions not only at the top level but also in the middle and lower ranks.²³ Ming scholar-officials called them northwestern *shufan* (Sinicized barbarians) on duty for the Ming state, and they differed from the *shengfan* (not Sinicized barbarians) who lived a primitive and liberated lifestyle. The Tibetan tea-horse trade with the Ming state was also ambiguously dubbed *xiaolao jingong* (on tributary duty).²⁴ In other words, they were given a nominal standing in the Ming official system, and thus set apart from the real *barbarians* who were completely foreign to the Chinese state.

Era 2

The tactic of alignment changed in the second era when the Ming Chinese and Mongols still had a *highly antagonistic* relationship, but reached a *near balance of power*, characterized by war and trade. Like the small states in a bipolar system, the intermediaries found more room to maneuver. They were no longer compliant clients of the Ming Chinese, but switched loyalty between two patrons, i.e. the Ming Chinese and Mongols. On the one hand, they continued to live on the tea monopolized by the Ming Chinese and could not afford to terminate trade with them. On the other hand, they were attacked and coerced by the invading Mongols, and even colluded with them, which distorted their relationship with the Ming Chinese. They

²¹ MSL-Hongwu, 225 (1393), p.3295.

²² A hierarchical organization emerged to relieve the uncertainty of control (Stinchcombe, 1990; White, 1985).

²³ For example, three chieftains were appointed to the jurisdiction of the Hezhou garrison: the He, Han and Wang families. Zhang (1983) compiled short biographies of the most important chieftain families from the Mongol-Yuan to the Qing Empires.

²⁴ HMJSWB: 447-a.

had the liberty of using one power against the other, as their dependence on the Ming Chinese waned.

In this context, the relationship of the Tibetans with the Chinese and the Mongols substantially changed. The patronizing power of the Ming Chinese over the Tibetans was reduced. The tea-horse trade itself was not lucratively sustainable in the long term, because it costed the Ming dearly. They had to bear all of the costs of producing, making, storing and transporting the tea. Moreover, the state monopoly dictated a price for tea that exceeded the market price. The Ming government could not prevent the Tibetans from trading horses with private tea smugglers.²⁵ Private transactions became too widespread to be prohibited and monitored by the Ming soldiers in the frontier.²⁶ Consequently, the best horses were more likely to be found in the private markets than in the official markets. The non-profitable trade could not be sustained for a long period of time.

The Mongols increased their leverage over the Tibetans as the Mongols were unrelenting in their military campaigns. According to our calculations, the Mongols led at least 23 expeditions against the Tibetans during this period of time. These expeditions were largely triggered by the reshuffling of power in the western frontier, induced by the succession crises, competition and other changes, which continued to divide the Mongols and compelled them to find alternative allies. The Tibetans in northwestern China were both victims and targets of alliance of the Mongols. The defeated Mongol chieftains fled to the west. They seized the trading routes of the Tibetans for survival and were hunted by other Mongols. These circumstances negatively affected the tea-horse markets. The Tibetan horse suppliers were enslaved by the Mongols and provided tributes in kind and laborers to their new masters.²⁷ Some of the Tibetans fled from their native residence and gave up pastoral life which was necessary to raise horses. The Mongols seized the Tibetan certificates and took over as the horse suppliers themselves. The Tibetans were only nominally Ming Chinese clients, but many of them became subordinates of the Mongols.

To summarize, the Tibetans in northwestern China were controlled by both the Ming Empire and the invading Mongols in the second era. They became the client of two patrons, which, however, did not diminish but increased their importance. There emerged a relational pattern similar to the extended principal-agent model (Adams, 1996; Reed, 2017; Shapiro, 2005), in which multiple principals compete for the allegiance of the same agents. The triadic relationship among the Ming Chinese,

²⁵ MSL-Zhengtong, 133 (1445), p.2639. According to this record, the Ming state found out that their officials profited from selling some of the monopolized tea for their own gain. As late as the 1530s, records show that civilians in Sichuan smuggled tea for trade with the Tibetans in Gansu privately. MSL-Jiajing, 140 (1532), p.3265.

²⁶ The Ming Chinese thus put into place special inspection sites at key points to check for horse smuggling in the summer and fall (the fourth to the ninth months in the lunar calendar). Originally, one inspector was sent to supervise the situation on a monthly basis (in total 24 inspectors were allocated to the area). However, the Ming government could not afford to do so in the long term and resorted to one inspector for every three months in 1435. MSL-Zhengtong, 4 (1435), p.83. This arrangement continued until at least 1467, see MSL-Chenghua, 45 (1467), p.926.

²⁷ MSL-Longqing, 18 (1568), p.507.

Mongols, and the Tibetans in northwestern China transcends the simple monopoly of control that characterizes dyadic power relationships. Unable to afford the complete defection of the Tibetans, the Ming court tolerated the dysfunctions of the tea-horse trade, and the Tibetans continued to act as a buffer to the Ming Chinese. The Mongols increased contact with the Tibetans and control over them, and used them indirectly to expand trade with the Ming Chinese. However, neither patron was able to monopolize control over their client. In this way, the Tibetans in northwestern China acquired room to maneuver.

Era 3

Any maneuvering opportunities dissipated in the third era, when Ming China and the Mongols enjoyed a relationship with low antagonism and a power balance through trade. The Ming court relied less on the buffering role of the intermediaries as their relationship with the Mongols improved. They did little to actively consolidate the tea-horse trade, but passively patronized the Tibetans in northwestern China. The Mongols continued to reinforce their relationship with the Tibetans. The Tibetans in northwestern China continued to cooperate with the two patrons, but their strategic importance was greatly reduced. They were diminishing in relevance as attention was increasingly drawn to the northeast frontier, where the Jurchens became a prominent power competitor. We therefore describe the change in fate of the Tibetans as their descent into irrelevance.

In the third era, the Ming court became more and more like a passive patron. The official tea-horse markets continued to deteriorate. After the Ming court rejected a proposal to reinstate the official horse markets in 1551, the security concerns around the Tibetans mainly focused on prohibiting tea smuggling.²⁸ This was due to the fear that uncontrolled distribution of private sources of tea might draw the Tibetans even closer to the Mongols, because they might use tea to lure the Mongols and ally with them. The Ming government also strictly forbade the Mongols to buy tea from the revenue through horse trade with the Ming state in attempts to prevent them from using tea to ally with the Tibetans.²⁹

Other than inhibiting the sharing of tea between the Tibetans in northwestern China and the Mongols, the Ming government overall showed a lack of interest in controlling their Tibetan clients. They only intervened when necessary to repress rebellions. In fact, the Tibetans did not cause any substantial unrest, largely because the Ming Chinese and Mongols maintained a relatively peaceful relationship. Despite the occasional revolts, the Tibetans remained dependent on the Ming Chinese for tea (see Table 1; trade continued, although it was sporadic). The Ming

²⁸ MSL-Jiajing, 369 (1551), p.36018.

²⁹ In 1576, a Ming state Shaanxi censor (*yu shi*) petitioned that the remaining tea from trade with the Tibetans should not be used to exchange horses with the Mongols. Moreover, he recommended that each year, trade with the Mongols should take place after trade with the Tibetans. In addition, the Ming state was advised to inform the Mongolian traders that they were to avoid inhabiting the space of the Tibetans during their trips to the designated market places. MSL-Wanli, 47 (1576), p.41270. In 1578, Bin-Tu, Altan's son, made another request to the Ming state to trade tea for their horses and threatened to initiate his own deals with the Tibetans in the northwest. The Ming Chinese threatened to shut down the market if Bin-Tu made another request for tea, see MSL-Wanli, 74 (1578), p.41817.

Table 1 Recorded frequency of tribute missions and trade: 1368–1644

Tribute partner	Frequency of tribute missions and trade ^a			
	Tribute amount	Era 1	Era 2	Era 3
Korea	In the thousands	11 (<i>Max</i> =20,000)	2 (<i>Max</i> =5000)	0
	In the hundreds	0	0	0
	Less than 100	11	1	0
Central Asia	In the thousands	6 (<i>Max</i> =4740)	0	0
	In the hundreds	11	1 (<i>Max</i> =200)	3
	Less than 100	3		0
Northeastern Tribes	In the thousands	1 (<i>Max</i> =1000)	1 (<i>Max</i> =1000)	0
	In the hundreds	1	4	2 (<i>Max</i> =410)
	Less than 10	3	1	
Tibetans	In the thousands	9 (<i>Max</i> =13,518)	11 (<i>Max</i> =14,050)	3 (<i>Max</i> =9600)
	In the hundreds	5	1	0
	Less than 100	0		
Mongols	In the thousands	1 (<i>Max</i> =1000)	12 (<i>Max</i> =~40,000)	20 (<i>Max</i> =~104,400 for three years)
	In the hundreds	2	6	7
	Less than 100	3	3	4

^a Based on the data in the three appendices

government seemed less concerned about the rebellions of the Tibetans than access to tea by the Mongols.³⁰

The Mongols, however, became more influential among the Tibetans. In the first half of the sixteenth century, the western expeditions of Altan Khan forced the subordination of the Tibetan tribes, who went to war with the Ming Chinese in Gansu (Q. Wang, 1993, p.135; Li, 2008, p.199).³¹ In 1559, Altan Khan and his two sons launched campaigns at the Gansu-Tibet border that was inhabited by the Oirats and the Tibetans. After crushing local resistance, Altan Khan went back to the central Mongolian plateau and divided the newly conquered land between his two sons.³² This conquest put the Northwest Tibetans solidly under the control of the Mongols, although they continued to rely on the Ming Chinese for tea.

The Mongols did not just coerce the Tibetans, but also developed solidarity with them. Their ties were strengthened by the promotion of Tibetan Buddhism among the Mongols by Altan Khan. In 1572, the year after the Ming Chinese and the Mongols officially reached a peace agreement, Altan Khan requested permission from the Ming

³⁰ MSL-Jiajing, 369 (1551), p.6604.

³¹ See petition by Zheng Luo, “jing chen bei yu hai lu shi yi yi mi hou huan shu” (On Proper Preparation for the Mongols active at Northwest so A Permanent Peace Becomes Possible) HMJSWB 405, p.4402. Since Gansu was situated enroute to the tributary merchants from Tibet or Central Asia to Beijing, the Amdo Mongols also predated upon the tributes or the rewards that these merchants received from the Ming (Li, 2008, pp.199–200).

³² MS, p.8546.

Chinese to invite Tibetan missionaries to Inner Mongolia. His passion to promote Tibetan Buddhism was strongly welcomed by the Ming state officials who believed the conversion of the Mongols into Tibetan Buddhists would be the best way to reduce their aggressiveness.³³

To summarize, the Tibetans in northwestern China continued to ally with both of their patrons in the third era. However, their ability to maneuver between the two power patrons was greatly reduced because their strategic importance declined as Ming China and the Mongols reached peaceful terms. They therefore descended into irrelevance.

The Uriyangqad Mongols: Descent into demise

Era 1

The second group of intermediaries are the Uriyangqad Mongols, the Mongol tribes who originally lived on the northeastern frontier in Ming China, a region that Lattimore (1940, p.107) dubbed the “Lower Manchuria” along the Liao River. Before the Uriyangqad Mongols moved southwards towards North China in the mid-Ming period, they actively controlled this critical corridor between Manchuria and the North China Plateau, thus constituting as an important player who moderated the relationship between the Mongols to their west and the Ming state to their south (Wada, 1984). The Uriyangqad Mongols included three military chieftains established during the Mongol-Yuan Empire.³⁴ In 1374, Yuan official Köke Temür, who controlled the Yuan empire, resisted the Ming armies and moved his troops to eastern Mongolia. The Ming emperor viewed this Yuan ruler who claimed to be the emperor-in-exile of China as his most formidable competitor. The Ming state shifted its focus to the northeast (see Zhao [Zhao, 2012, pp.87–89] on this change in military direction). In 1389, the Uriyangqad Mongols submitted to the Ming Empire. They were allocated to the Duoyan, Fuyu, and Taining commandaries.³⁵

Like the Tibetans in northwestern China, the Uriyangqad Mongols aligned with the Ming Empire in the first era. They were granted official titles and the right to trade horses. They did not supply as many horses as the Tibetans, but also traded other local products with the Chinese.³⁶ Not desiring tea, their local rulers wanted satin and silk while their people wanted grains and handicrafts. None of these goods were sufficiently

³³ MSL-Longqing, 65 (1572), p.1568.

³⁴ The three chieftains were not established until the late Yuan period and called Taizhou, Huiyier, and Duoyinsan (Wada, 1984, pp.90–124). Lattimore (1940) emphasized that even though the Ming documents used Uriyangqad to label the three divisions, Uriyangqad strictly speaking only refers to the Duoyan tribe.

³⁵ The Uriyangqad Mongols took over the Daning garrison in 1428, the year when the Ming Chinese withdrew their defense line southward to the Great Wall. They began to move southward thereafter and inhabited the heart of Ming China in the north. During their southward migration, the Uriyangqad Mongols were in contact with both the Ming Chinese and the Mongols and also participated in internecine wars with the Mongols.

³⁶ We do not have comprehensive data about the horse transactions of the Uriyangqad Mongols and Jurchens. They contributed horses through two channels - tribute missions and horse markets. They owned in total about 1500 permits. As for the horse markets, according to our limited sources, the number of horses traded with these northeastern tribes was far below that in the Tibetan tea-horse markets and in trade with Korea and Central Asia (4 entries of tribute missions and 3 entries of horse markets in Appendix 1).

available in their own societies, but the Chinese had an abundance of them. The Uriyangqad Mongols were mobilized as tribal soldiers to gather military intelligence and buffer direct attacks from the Mongols. They created distance to buffer the threat of the Mongols to the Ming Chinese.

Similar to the golden-plate system in the Tibetan tea-horse trade, approximately 300 tribute permits were granted by the Ming court to the Uriyangqad Mongols under the Yongle reign. Only permit holders were allowed to trade and pay tribute visits twice a year (Te-mu-le., 2007). One horse could be nominally brought in with each tribute permit for each visit. All of these transactions were strictly regulated and inspected by the Ming frontier officials. Being clients, the Uriyangqad Mongols were strategically important to the Ming security in the northeast, to buffer the infiltration of the Mongols. Nevertheless, with the rise and expansion of Mongol power in the second era, the Uriyangqad Mongols changed their tactics as well.

Era 2.

In the second era, the relationship between the Chinese and Mongols was highly antagonistic with a power balance. There were at least three major waves of Mongolian aggressions eastward, which were triggered by the internal fracturing of the Mongols. Unlike with the Tibetans in northwestern China, the Mongols not only attacked the Uriyangqad, but also colluded with them frequently and even intermarried with them due to their ethnic affinity.

The Tartar Mongols led the first wave of aggression. The expedition of the Yongle Emperor against Arughtai in 1410 forced the Tartar Mongols to advance into the territory of the Uriyangqad Mongols. The Tartar Mongols not only attacked the Uriyangqad Mongols, but also colluded with them to infiltrate the Ming border garrisons. The second wave of aggression was launched by the Oirats. After they defeated Arughtai in 1435, they colluded with the Uriyangqad Mongols from time to time to loot the Ming Chinese border region and the Jurchens.³⁷ They also attacked the Uriyangqad Mongols when they became defiant and turned to the Ming Chinese.³⁸ Moreover, as was the case with the Tartar Mongols, the Oirat leaders arranged intermarriages with the local rulers of the Uriyangqad Mongol commandaries to secure their loyalty.³⁹ The Mongol infiltration continued after the death of Esen in 1455, which led to the third wave of Mongol aggression. Although there were fewer attacks, they were not any less devastating.⁴⁰ Overall, the Mongol armies were able to gain more access than they could in the northwest because the Uriyangqad Mongols intermarried with the Mongols. However, as in the northwest, the Mongol invasions drastically transformed the horse markets in the northeast. The control of the Ming state over the Uriyangqad Mongols also declined during this period of time.

³⁷ See entries in the MSL-Zhengtong (1437), (1439), (1442).

³⁸ See entries in the MSL-Zhengtong, (1446), (1447) and MSL-Jingtai, (1451). There are a few records in the MSL on the attack of the Uriyangqad Mongols on the Ming Chinese border in 1411, 1412, 1415, 1417, 1421, 1425, 1430, 1432, and 1433. The record for 1415 clearly stated that Arughtai enlisted the three commandaries of the Uriyangqad to balance the power of his competitor, the Oirats.

³⁹ See entries in the MSL-Zhengtong (1438), (1441).

⁴⁰ See entries in the MSL-Tianshun (1459), (1462), (1464) and the MSL-Chenghua, (1465), (1466), (1476) and (1483).

Against this context, the Uriyangqad Mongols became a client of two patrons. On the one hand, they wanted to trade with the Ming Chinese, but could not curb the infiltration of the Mongols. While the Ming court could not monopolize control, they also could not afford the complete defection of their client either. Their efforts to manipulate situational needs, rather than reinforcing the loyalty of the clients, is exemplified by their deliberations on complete suspension of the markets for the intermediaries. The Ming government had once suspended the markets in Guangning, which was in the Zhengtong era (1436–1449) as they were concerned about the integrity of the Uriyangqad Mongols.⁴¹ Yet, the Uriyangqad Mongols who suffered from the shutdown of the Guangning markets, petitioned the Liaodong Regional Commander (*zong bing guan dudu tongzhi*) Ou Xin in 1478 to reopen the markets. They reported that they were pressured by the northern Mongols to defect from Ming China.⁴² Alarmed by the possible alliance of the Uriyangqad Mongols and the northern Mongols, the Ming officials proposed to reopen the horse markets. In other words, the Ming government did not want to alienate its clients, even when their loyalty was questionable.

This example also shows that the intermediaries acquired more space to maneuver between the great powers. The Ming Chinese had to tolerate the occasional defection of their intermediaries rather than alienating them, which would result in complete defection or the formation of alliances that could compromise the security of the Ming state.⁴³ There are a few documents that record the deliberation of the Mongols themselves around this issue, but apparently, they wanted to use the Uriyangqad Mongols to expand trade opportunities rather than completely dominate and rule over them. As such, the Uriyangqad Mongols faced pressure from both patrons, but also used their unique position to increase their influence on the two great powers.

Era 3

The political power of the Uriyangqad, however, dissipated in the third era when the Ming Chinese and the Mongols started to enjoy a relationship of low antagonism with a power balance. This led to the almost complete assimilation of the Uriyangqad Mongols with the invading Mongols, and they lost their status as a self-standing intermediary. We therefore describe the change in fate of the Uriyangqad Mongols as their descent into demise.

Like the Tibetans in northwestern China, the Uriyangqad Mongols lost their strategic importance as trade prevailed between the Ming Chinese and Mongols. The tribute trade system was abandoned. We could only find one tribute record between the Ming Chinese and the Uriyangqad Mongols during this time (see Appendix Table 5). While the trading markets in the northeast continued to flourish, they were increasingly under the control of the Mongols. Before the mid-sixteenth century, the eastern Mongols who had occupied the land of the Uriyangqad Mongols conducted trade in the name of the

⁴¹ MSL-Chenghua, 176 (1478), pp.3183–3184.

⁴² MSL- Chenghua 158 (1476), pp.2885–2886.

⁴³ Relaxing control is not a sign of weakness. The persistent lack of resources and competition with the Dutch East India Company led the East India Company to adopt a strategy that appeased the employees to alleviate the problem of control (Erikson & Bearman, 2006, p.204). This strategy proved more effective than centralizing and tightening control which was used by the Dutch East India Company.

latter in Guangning and Kaiyuan (Bao, 1998, pp. 236–7).⁴⁴ The assimilation was gradual, which took place through both military conquest and intermarriages between the tribal rulers.⁴⁵ Among the eastern Mongols, the left wing, i.e. the Chakhar Mongols, had the strongest influence on the Uriyangqad Mongols. One of the Chakhar Mongol tribes, the Khalkha Mongols, moved south and violated the boundary line between the Fuyu and Taining divisions in the 1560s. In their prime, the Khalkha Mongols occupied all of Fuyu and invaded the eastern edge of Taining (Wada, 1984, p.504). After the 1571 trade treaty, the Khalkha Mongols completely dominated Fuyu and Taining (Long, 2013, p.28). Unable to counter the Mongol aggression from the west and the north, some of the Uriyangqad Mongols escaped northward. Although the Ming state documents continued to identify the leaders of Taining and Fuyu as Uriyangqad Mongols, Wada (1984, pp.489–99) proved that they were actually Khalkha Mongols at the end of the Ming era. The third division of Uriyangqads, Duoyan, was a victim of the Kharachin Mongols, who was also affiliated with the Chakhar Mongols. In 1620, the last Uriyangqad chieftain, Duo-Yan, was mistakenly identified as a Kharachin in the Ming documents (Wada, 1984, p.460).

In other words, the Uriyangqad Mongols gradually became indistinguishable from the Mongols, and their intermediary position was subsequently eliminated.⁴⁶

The Jurchens: Rise towards power

Era 1

The final and third group of intermediaries discussed in this study are the Jurchens, the descendants of an earlier people who created the Jin state (1115–1234) in late medieval China. There were three divisions of the Jurchens in the Ming dynasty: the Haixi, Jianzhou and Donghai Jurchens (the latter were called the wild Jurchens in Ming official documents because they had the least direct contact with the Ming state due to their remote location). They were active in the eastern and northern parts of Manchuria, where the forests created a transitional environment “from Siberia all the way to the edge of ‘Chinese’ environment of lower Manchuria, and also far into Korea”

⁴⁴ The Ming garrison troops in 1567 captured 375 eastern Mongols who pretended to be Uriyangqads to go to the border market, MSL-Longqing, 11 (1567), p.313. Such grey areas of trading by the Mongols remained the case after 1571 because the Ming state did not want the treaty signed with Altan Khan to wholly legitimize frontier trade with all Mongols (Bao, 1998, pp.237–8).

⁴⁵ MSL-Wanli, 454 (1609), p.8575. The chieftain of the Duoyan commandary married the daughter of a Mongol chieftain outside of Xuanfu. The Duoyan commandary became an affiliate of the Kharachin tribe of the eastern Mongols. They assumed the title of Uriyangqad and led tribute missions twice a year. Each time, they brought 600 horses with them. They were also allowed to freely trade horses and cattle in both the northeastern and the Xuanfu markets.

⁴⁶ For more information on how the eastern Mongols turned the Uriyangqad Mongols into their affiliates, see “Lu

Long Sai Lue” (A Summary of Lulong Fortress) by Guo Zaoqing ([Ming dynasty] Guo, 2000), “Jimen Kao” (A Study of Jimen) by Mi Wanchun ([Ming dynasty] Mi, 2000), and “Jizhen Bianfang” (The Border Defense of Jizhou Garrison on the Great Wall) by Qi Jiguang ([Ming dynasty] Qi, 2000). According to Guo Zaoqing, the three commanderies of the Uriyangqad Mongols were thereby absorbed by both wings of the Tartar Mongols. The west wing, i.e. Altan Khan and his brothers and nephews controlled 23 tribes of the Uriyangqad Mongols which comprised more than 7840 people. The east wing of the Mongols controlled 19 tribes of the Uriyangqad Mongols, which consisted of more than 6680 people.

(Lattimore, 1940, p.110). After the Ming Chinese took control over the Jurchen inhabited region in 1384, they began an alliance policy. The Ming state granted honorary titles to various Jurchen tribe leaders and incorporated them into their garrisons.⁴⁷ The garrison headships were passed on within Jurchen chieftain families across generations. The Jurchens were also in close contact with the Uriyangqad Mongols and intermarriages were prevalent (Bao, 1998, p.253).

The Jurchens thus aligned with the Ming state, at roughly the same time with the Uriyangqad Mongols.⁴⁸ The Jianzhou and Haixi Jurchens obtained approximately 1000 permits to trade horses with the Ming Chinese in exchange for needed goods. The institution of their horse trade largely resembled that of the Uriyangqad, except that the Jurchens were considered to be closer allies of the Ming Chinese than the other intermediaries. For example, the Ming officials associated the Jurchens with the eastern *barbarians* (*dongyi*), a large number of individuals who were extended to include the Koreans and considered to be the most assimilated non-Chinese who followed the Chinese Confucian culture. Yet, there was doubt casted on the ethnic affiliation of the Uriyangqad Mongols tribes. While they were associated with the eastern *barbarians*, they were still Mongol in origin, and also belonged to the northern caityffs (the Mongols).⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the Jurchens were considered to be superior to the Uriyangqad Mongols and culturally more affiliated with the Ming Chinese, even though the two groups conducted similar tribute missions and traded in the same markets.

Era 2

Trade continued between the Ming state and the Jurchens in the second era. It should be noted that Jurchens were never a major provider of horses to the Ming Chinese. The so-called horse trade for the Jurchens operated more like a civil market, actually comprising transactions of many other goods. Even so, the recorded number of traded horses significantly decreased since the second era (see Appendices 2 and 3). The records show that the Jurchen rulers led fewer tributary missions to the Ming Empire and the patronizing power of the Ming state over the Jurchens likewise declined. An important reason to explain for this phenomenon was that the Mongols launched expeditions eastward to attack the Jurchens.⁵⁰ The Ming court urged the Jurchens to battle the invading Mongol armies and defend the Ming Chinese border.⁵¹

Nevertheless, the Oirats also made clandestine arrangements with the Jurchen rulers.⁵² Like the Uriyangqad Mongols, the Jurchens became the client of two patrons. They fought for the Ming court, but also made secret deals with the Mongols. They had sufficient room to maneuver between the two great powers.

⁴⁷ The first Ming garrison established in the Manchuria was the Jianzhou garrison (1403).

⁴⁸ The Jurchens comprised the sedentary Jianzhou and Maolian tribes, who lived northwest of the Yalu River and south of the Changbai mountains, and the semi-agricultural Haixi Jurchens who resided near the Sungari and Ashih Rivers, and the warlike Wild Jurchens, who hunted and fished along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers (Twitchett & Mote, 1998, p.266).

⁴⁹ HMJSWB: 2436-b; 273-b.

⁵⁰ We find a few entries about this; for example, in the MSL-Yongle (1424) and MSL-Xuande (1433).

⁵¹ See entries in the MSL-Zhengtong (1444), (1445).

⁵² See entries in the MSL- Zhengtong (1437), (1442).

Era 3.

Although the Ming-Jurchen relationship followed a somehow similar path as that of the Tibetans and Uriyangqad Mongols, a difference emerged with the transition from the second to the third eras. Both the Tibetans in northwestern China and the Uriyangqad Mongols saw their intermediary position diminish. Trade alleviated hostility, but also reduced the strategic importance of the intermediaries as a buffer for the Ming Chinese. Among the three, only the Jurchens were able to capitalize on the opportunities that came from the new mode of interaction between the two great powers. They were not reduced to a useless intermediary, instead they moved forward and evolved into a true broker, and eventually a new power patron. In doing so, they shifted the imperial power struggle to the northeast.

What is a true broker and what makes a true broker? As Burt (2004) argued, true brokers are able to transcend the boundaries of local groups and synthesize options to make innovations. The current literature on brokers emphasizes the importance of the intermediary position which enables an actor to overcome group constraints, especially with the homogeneity of information. Some studies have pointed out that the capacity of intermediaries varies in different situations. Gould and Fernandez (1989) explained a case in which the occupants of brokerage positions in a community only derive influence from their position to the extent that they are deficient in mobilizable resources. Moreover, intermediaries can make critical decisions that maximize their given structural advantages. As Padgett and Ansell (1993) showed, the Medici family in Italy adopted strategic moves to benefit from their social networks. Their political control was not deliberately sought but inadvertently acquired through network ties after the Revolt of the Ciompi in 1378 took place, in which laborers revolted against the oligarchy and heavy taxes, as well as from the new men (bankers and merchants) who resented the power of the oligarchy. The power capacity of the intermediaries (Gould, 1989) is therefore not determined by position alone, but varies in different contexts, depending on the substantive traits of the intermediaries and their specific agenda of interest. The Jurchen case is especially relevant to this discussion on the conditions of brokerage. The Jurchens became a true broker when their initial intermediary position was at risk.

Why did the Jurchens, and not the other two intermediaries, become a powerful broker at a seemingly inopportune time? First, the Jurchens were located between the Ming and the Mongol empires, but not at the center of the Ming-Mongol confrontation. The Mongol attacks significantly changed the structure of the Jurchen society, as they did to the Tibetans in northwestern China and the Uriyangqad Mongols. The permit system was nearly eliminated because many chieftain officials were killed and their permits and seals were seized by the Mongols (Ma, 1985, pp.1–42). However, unlike the Tibetans and Uriyangqad Mongols, the Jurchens were not coerced into subordination to the Mongols. They were not ethnically close to the Mongols as was the case for the Uriyangqad Mongols, or religiously similar to the Mongols, as was the case for the Tibetans. The Mongol invasions disturbed the local order, but did not result in infiltration or political control.

In other words, the Mongols did not heed the Jurchens, which gave space to the local Jurchen rulers to reorganize their political power. The lesser notables of the Jurchens rose to battle one after another after the Mongol invasion, which was greatly conducive

to power consolidation within the Jurchen community. In the early fifteenth century, each Jurchen guard consisted of several hundred inhabitants, but one century later, Jurchen rulers often ruled over thousands and even tens of thousands of people (Twitchett & Mote, 1998, p.269). Competition was driven by the desire to monopolize trade by seizing trade permits. As a result, tribute permits were consolidated in the hands of a few of the most powerful rulers, who were able to monopolize the tribute trade with the Ming Chinese. In the early sixteenth century, four major tribes of the Haixi Jurchens became subordinate to a new leader called Wang Tai, who monopolized 1498 trading permits. This kind of trade monopoly was later repeated by Nurhaci, the leader of the Jianzhou Jurchens, who paved the way for the establishment of the Qing Empire.

The Jurchens not only benefited from the indifference of the Mongols, but also from the oversight of the Ming court. The Ming court neglected the rise of the Jurchens because they were culturally biased. The Ming court usually considered the Jurchens as their most intimate ally among all three intermediaries because they resided in the southern part of Manchuria. They were thought to be thoroughly immersed in the Chinese culture. The Ming government was generous to them and allowed them to benefit from *laissez faire* trade. In other words, the Jurchens were given more freedom to trade than the other two intermediaries. The Ming court was indifferent to the revolt of the Jurchens because they were convinced that the Jurchens were *sophisticated* people attracted by trade benefits, unlike the real *barbarians*. In 1588, the Ming state intervened to resolve the strife among the Haixi Jurchens. In an edict, the emperor persuaded the Haixi Jurchens to focus on trade profits: they could collect sable and ginseng from *jiangyi* (faraway Jurchen tribes), and acquire cloth, salt, rice and agricultural tools from the Chinese (Mao, 1985, p.56).

The Jurchen markets were therefore not like the quota system of the Tibetan markets, as they were more autonomous in operation. They were made available ten times each month during the Wanli era (1563–1620) (Wang, 2011a, 2011b, p.54). Unlike the markets for the Mongols sponsored by centrally-allocated funds, the Jurchen markets were self-operating and financed by local taxation.⁵³ These markets resembled normal civil markets where a variety of goods, not just horses, were traded. Pelts (such as sable, mink and squirrel) and ginseng, desired by wealthy Chinese, were the most popular goods offered by the Jurchens. Trading these goods gave them tremendous wealth and also closely linked their markets to the consumption of the Chinese, who were experiencing an expansion of the moneyed market in the sixteenth century (Wakeman Jr, 1986, p.48, footnote 60).⁵⁴ The Jurchens traded these goods for grains, salt, utensils, textile, and also money. Unlike the Mongols, who were eager to acquire silk and cotton cloth, the Jurchens preferred the monetary value of textiles. With silver

⁵³ “The government allocated scarce money for the operation of markets in Liaodong. Those markets were mainly run by local tax income.” See MSL-Wanli, 127 (1582), p.2363. The local officials taxed some goods and also the merchants who participated in these markets. They also collected transit taxes for goods that passed by certain key locations such as the Shan Hai Fort (shan hai guan) on the Great Wall. These markets operated like civil markets. See MSL-Wanli, 366 (1601), p.6847.

⁵⁴ Wealthy families in the Ming era loved to wear gowns with pelts and desired ginseng as a health remedy (Luan, 2005).

in hand, the Jurchens could more freely purchase goods that they desired from different sources. In general, the trading of the Jurchens with the Ming Chinese was more commercialized in nature than any of the other groups.

In hindsight, if the Ming Empire still distributed trading permits among the chieftain families, this liberal market policy might not have led to the monopolization of trading by a few leading families. However, the negligence of both great powers gave room to the Jurchens to centralize their political rule, which was juxtaposed with a vibrant market economy. The Ming court underestimated the effects of simultaneous political and economic development that is typical in state building (Adams, 1996; Ertman, 1997; Tilly, 1990). The consolidation of power among the Jurchens reduced the distribution of economic resources and led to a monopoly in trading by the most capable rulers, who were the potential state builders. The commercialization of markets provided substantial income to the rulers, thus facilitating the initiation of administration and military forces. In the long term, simultaneous political and economic development led to the formation of the Jurchen state, who then sought autonomy from both the Mongols and Chinese.

Therefore, unlike the other two intermediaries, whose agency was severely cut short as the relationship between the two large empires evolved into one of low antagonism with a power balance, the Jurchens developed new tactics to reinforce their importance. Their success was incidentally resultant of the negligence of the two empires.

Moreover, the Jurchen leaders redefined their relationships with the neighboring secondary powers. They created rather than inherited a structural hole position with the surrounding powers.

The leading Jurchen tribes cut off the means of access of the wild Jurchens who were located further north to the Ming Chinese, and also their connections between the eastern Mongol tribes and Ming Chinese. In doing so, they created their own dependent clients. The Ming rulers initially provided trading opportunities among the sedentary Jianzhou and Maolian tribes, the semi-agricultural Haixi Jurchens, and the warlike wild Jurchens. In the third era, the wild Jurchens rarely paid tribute visits. Even when they did so, they took a detour and passed through the land of the Haixi Jurchens (Long, 2013, p.20). The Jianzhou and Haixi Jurchens controlled the wild Jurchens through a trade monopoly. They sold sable pelts and ginseng to the Chinese for cloth, rice, salt, agricultural tools and handicrafts. They then resold those goods to distant Jurchen tribes such as the Wula and Hoifa. The Wula and Hoifa tribes then proceeded to sell surplus cloth and agricultural goods to the wild Jurchens who were even more remote, and were offered sable pelts of the best quality in return (Long, 2013, p.20; Luan, 2000, p.74). Situated on the top of these trading hierarchies, the Jianzhou and Haixi Jurchens monopolized the provision of popular products desired by the Ming state, such as sable pelts and ginseng. At the same time, they cut off the contact of the other Jurchen tribes with the Ming Chinese. These Jurchen state makers controlled the marginal Jurchens who resided further north and made it difficult for the Ming government to use their previous strategy of divide and rule to fracture their relationship.

The Jurchen leaders also made efforts to sever the connections between the neighboring Mongol tribes and the Ming Chinese. The Khorchin Mongols belonged to the left wing of the Mongols. In the sixteenth century, they still frequently traded in the Kaiyuan markets and sometimes with the Ming Chinese through the facilities

of the Haixi Jurchens. Lindan Khan of the Chakhar Mongols became a prominent leader of the left wing, and constantly curtailed the power of the Khorchin Mongols. The Khorchin Mongols were thus on good terms with the Haixi Jurchens and shared the trading benefits of the latter. In the early 1600s, the Jianzhou Jurchens launched wars against the Haixi Jurchens and defeated them in 1619, which was a major step in monopolizing trade. The Jianzhou tribes, who had already established the Later Jin Dynasty, occupied Kaiyuan in 1619, and then Guangning in 1622. As the Jurchens controlled these two critical markets, they seized the trade opportunities of the Khorchin Mongols, who had to negotiate with the Jianzhou Jurchens to trade for Chinese goods. Caught between the Jurchens and Chakhar Mongols, the Khorchin Mongols had no choice but to submit to the Jurchens as a means of survival (see Bao, 1998 on these events, pp.267–8). Other tribes, including the Khalkha Mongols, and Aohan and Naiman tribes of the Chakhar Mongols, became Jurchen allies for the same reason: the Jurchens controlled the markets that were vital for their survival.

The dominant Jurchen tribes thus successfully created a structural hole (characterized by “disconnections or nonquivalencies between players” in the arena [Burt, 1995, pp.1–2]) by severing trade contact between their potential allies and the Ming Chinese. Cutting off trade between the wild Jurchens and the Ming state allowed the dominant Jurchen tribes to gain control over the more *backward* Jurchens. By positioning themselves as the only means to access Chinese goods, the Jurchens successfully patronized the marginalized Mongols who were excluded by the dominant Mongol tribes. Controlling them was therefore an important step to fracture and mitigate the power of the Mongols.

In controlling these new subordinate clients, the Jurchens emerged as a true power broker at a time when their importance as an intermediary declined. As the erstwhile intermediary became a new patron, their relationship with the original patrons would also change accordingly. Thus, the Jurchens became a competitor, and a real power contender.

As a new patron, the Jurchens controlled their own dependent clients, but at the same time, they were dependent on the Ming Chinese, i.e. the primary patron. As a new patron, the Jurchens needed to increase their economic strength to facilitate the dependence of their own clients. For example, when the Mongols agreed to ally with the Jurchens, the Jurchens offered to trade cloth for their livestock (MWLD1 1990a, pp.398–400). The Mongols therefore became more dependent on the Jurchens because they were not allowed to trade with the Ming Chinese, who questioned their loyalty. This greatly burdened the Jurchens because their economic productivity was not sufficient enough to sustain this dependent relationship. In 1627, a source indicated that there was exorbitant inflation caused by the shortage of textiles and other everyday goods in the area controlled by the Jurchens.⁵⁵ To sustain the dependence of their Mongol clients, the Jurchens had to provide these goods—which mostly originated

⁵⁵ The source indicated that food was scarce and cannibalism was not uncommon. Although the Jurchens accumulated large amounts of bullions, they lacked material goods, which resulted in huge inflation. A good horse was worth more than 300 silver taels. Satin and cloth were also extremely expensive (MWLD2 1990b, p.857).

from China— as gifts. They had to change how they controlled land and other resources, which greatly contributed to their expansion.⁵⁶

Increasing the dependence of their own clients however only served to further increase the dependence of the Jurchens themselves on trade with the Ming state. To reduce this dependence and increase their own autonomy, as true brokers usually do, the Jurchens attempted to diversify the source of their goods by actively pursuing trade with Korea. In 1627, the Jurchens launched a military campaign against Korea and forced Korea to open their grain markets (MWLD2 1990b, p.876, 878, 886). The Jurchens thus acquired a significant amount of cloth and silk from Korea, which came indirectly from the trade between Korea and the Ming Chinese (MWLD2 1990b, pp.1087–94). In the long term, however, direct confrontation with the Ming Chinese was almost inevitable because only by replacing the primary patron could the new patron ensure its own domination.

These movements show that the Jurchen rulers adeptly played the role of true brokers. Unlike the northwest Tibetans who became irrelevant in the power struggles between the Chinese and the Mongols, or the Uriyangqad Mongols who assimilated with the Mongols, the Jurchens changed the rules by becoming an active state builder and a true broker. We emphasize that they became brokers because they did not simply have an advantageous position and distributed resources to their clients without hard work. They created their own clients, and feared defection of their clients just like any other patron. Their economic dependence on Ming China meant that control over their own clients was very precarious. Earning autonomy was their only means of leaving this dire situation. Not surprisingly, the Jurchens eventually declared autonomy and became a regime competitor of the Ming state.

Conclusion

We have examined the changing agency of three intermediaries in inter-great power games. The intermediaries were located on the edges of the Ming Empire. Like the ancient Roman Empire using diplomatic treaties and occasional military interventions to control its client states and tribes (Parker, 2001, p.30), the Ming court implemented a loose, non-territorial control of the nomadic groups beyond its northern borders. However, we highlight in this paper that these nomadic groups were not just clients of the Ming Empire, but were intermediary groups situated between great powers. Therefore, a simple center-periphery, or patron-client model cannot properly explain the agency of these groups.

The middling position of the intermediaries gives them flexibility that can be turned into power. This is a classical argument made by the world system theory. In the world system analysis, the agency of the intermediaries was largely determined by the semi-

⁵⁶ The Jurchens of Jianzhou, the state builders, incorporated more Chinese cultural elements into their lifestyle than the other Jurchen tribes due to their geographical proximity to China. After they took control of Liaodong, the southern part of Manchuria, they became more linked to the Chinese economy. As Wakeman (1986, p.48, footnote 54) pointed out, the Jurchen aristocracy (they might also be known as the Manchus after 1622) developed large land estates after 1625. For example, in 1634, the son of Daisan had 23 estates with a total of 503 slave cultivators. When the Jurchens controlled Liaodong, a significant number of the local residents were Chinese frontiersmen.

peripheral position they occupied. The geographical locations of the semi-peripheral states were identified and their social structures characterized (Chase-Dunn, 1988; Terlouw, 2002, pp. 5–6). The semi-peripheries typically controlled certain surplus values that enabled them to explore the periphery but not enough to promote themselves into the core (See Chase-Dunn, 1998; Wallerstein, 1976, 1979, 1981, 2011; Wallerstein et al., 1982). Semi-peripheries were more likely to run into violent social conflicts or to wage wars than the peripheries (Chase-Dunn, 1988; Chase-Dunn & Hall, 1997). They could trigger economic and political changes that spread to the core and the periphery. The source of the power of the intermediaries exactly rested on the in-betweenness of their location. In a word, the agency of the semi-periphery was positional, not relational (on the positional power of the intermediaries, also see Wang, 2015).

The three intermediaries we examined all had a middling position between the Ming Chinese and the Mongols. However, they were not naturally advantaged or disadvantaged by this position. In different periods of time, they adopted roles that varied depending on the balance of power between the two great powers and their changing interrelationships. We therefore adopt a relational rather than positional approach to examine the agency of the intermediaries. The agency of the intermediaries is conditioned by the changing relationships between the two power centers, i.e. the Ming Chinese and the Mongols, which were affected by the substantive interests and internal organizations of the power centers. Based on these cases, we develop a model that shows how the power of the intermediaries evolved (see Table 2). The model shows that antagonism between the imperial powers rather than peace had added importance to the intermediaries. A certain degree of enmity that did not lead to the rise of hegemony, but power balance between the two empires, provided space for the intermediaries to bargain for their own interests. When the two imperial powers agreed to peaceful trade, they no longer needed the intermediaries as buffers or contact points. As a result, the Tibetans in northwestern China became irrelevant and desperately tried to retain their status quo but in vain. The Uriyangqad Mongols assimilated with the Mongols. The changing interrelationships between the Chinese and the Mongols structurally inhibited the political freedom of the intermediaries.

Moreover, the structural constraints were not decisive. When the relationship between the two imperial powers evolved into one with low antagonism and a power balance, not all three intermediaries had a doomed fate. Instead, there was active differentiation. The

Table 2 The interrelationship and power contrast between Chinese and the Mongols

	Power imbalance	Power balance
High antagonism between Chinese and Mongols	<u>Era 1</u> 1. The Ming Empire was strong and hegemonic. 2. Intermediaries had to align with one hegemony.	<u>Era 2</u> 1. The Ming Empire both traded and warred with the Mongols.
	Low antagonism between Chinese and Mongols	<u>Era 3</u> 1. The Ming Empire and the Mongols ceased upfront warfare. 2. The intermediaries differentiated themselves and some disappeared while others survived.

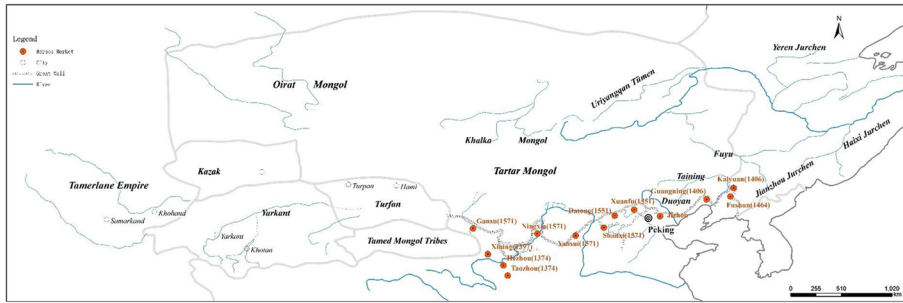


Fig. 2 The Location of Horse Markets in Northern Frontiers

Jurchens did not passively cope with the loss of opportunities, but became a true power broker when their middling position was being phased out. The *success* of the Jurchen was fortuitous because they were not positioned right at the center of the Chinese-Mongol conflicts. The repercussions due to the changes in relationship between the two imperial powers also substantially changed how political power was concentrated among the Jurchens, but did not result in their subordination. More importantly, the Jurchens were the most trustworthy ally of the Ming Chinese who enjoyed favored treatment in horse trade, thus giving them the opportunity to expand their markets into a viable economy of their own. Thus, the Jurchens took advantage of these opportunities to create a structural hole position and became a true power broker. Our study attests to the ability of actors to effectively mobilize relational resources in order to create a favorable position when their intermediary position was rendered insignificant.

Our study therefore shows that the agency of the intermediaries can be flexible. Figure 2 shows the course of the agency of the intermediaries rather than the fixed attributes. Like modern small states, their agency was greatly constrained by the interrelationship of the great powers. They enjoyed more autonomy in a system dominated by two powers rather than one power, and had more bargaining power when the two powers were bound by enmity rather than benevolence. Unlike the modern small states, they were not recognized as an equal member of the international system and therefore did not receive protection from the international society. Neither did they have a normative or discursive advantage that allowed them to receive and secure a normative order recognized by the international society. Their role was more volatile than that of the small states in the international system. They could assimilate with a great power, like how the Uriyangqad Mongols assimilated with the Mongols. They might also be as competent as the Jurchens, who did not merely strive for survival between the great powers, but became a power contender that challenged the two great powers. The agency of the intermediaries therefore has a wider range with more options than small states in the international system.

The powers discussed here were entangled in a web of hierarchically structured relations. The intermediaries, while intimidated by the great powers in terms of their economic, military and even cultural resources, were not passive pawns. They could effectively adjust to or even change their position in the evolving power relations to their advantage. They were navigators in the web of power, but also substantive entities who carried their own traditions, endorsed their own cultural values, and pursued their own interests.

Appendix

Table 3 Horse Trade in First Era (1368–1424)

Year	Tribute Partner	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
Tribute Missions		
Korea (Kingdom of Koryō succeeded by Chosŏn dynasty after 1392)		
1372	Korea	17
1373	Korea	50
1377	Korea	60
1378	Korea	60
1384	Korea	2000
1385	Korea	5000
1386	Korea	3040/5000 ^a
1387	Korea	16
1390	Korea	48
1392	Korea	10,000 ^b
1394	Korea	9880 ^c
1394	Korea	14
1401	Korea	10,000 ^d
1402	Korea	2600 ^e
1403	Korea	1000 ^f
1406	Korea	36
1407	Korea	3000
1414	Korea	20
1418	Korea	40
1421	Korea	10,000
1423	Korea	30
1423	Korea	20,000
Central Asia		
1387	Samarkand	15
1388	Samarkand	300
1389	Samarkand	205
1390	Samarkand	670 ^g
1392	Samarkand	84
1394	Samarkand	200
1396	Samarkand	212
1397	Samarkand	240
1397	Samarkand	1095
1402	Muslim merchants	160
1403	Hami	190
1403	Hami	4740

Table 3 (continued)

Year	Tribute Partner	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
1406	Hami	35
1408	Muslim merchants	300–500
1416	Hami/Turfan ^b	170
1416	Hami	300
1419	Hami	3546
1421	Hami	1000
1422	Hami/Turfan ⁱ	1300
1423	Hami	1000
Northeastern Tribes		
1403	Jurchen	13
1406	Uriyangqad Mongols-Fuyu	70
1406	Uriyangqad Mongols-Fuyu	70
1419	Uriyangqad Mongols-Taining	1000
Mongols		
1411	Tartar—Arughtai	1000
1412	Tartar—Arughtai	200
1415	Oirats	50
1415	Tartar—Arughtai	75
1418	Tartar—Arughtai	70
1420	Tartar—Arughtai	900
Horse Markets		
Northeastern Tribes		
1424	Kaiyuan	200 Cost: unknown
Tibetans		
1377	Qinzhou-Hezhou	171 Cost: unknown
1380	Qinzhou-Hezhou	1691 Cost: unknown
1380	Qinzhou-Hezhou	2050 Cost: 58,892 <i>jin</i> tea and 98 cows
1382	Qinzhou-Hezhou	181 Cost: unknown
1382	Taozhou	135 Cost: unknown
1383	Qinzhou-Hezhou-TaozhouQingyuan	585 Cost: unknown
1386	Qinzhou-Hezhou and Xunan-Guizhouwusa -Ningchuan-Bijie	6729 Cost: unknown
1387	Shaanxi	2807 Cost: unknown
1390	Xining-Minzhou-Hezhou	7060 Cost: cash 600,000 ding
1392	Hezhou	10,340

Table 3 (continued)

Year	Tribute Partner	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
1395	Yazhou-Diaomen and QinzhouHezhou	Cost: ~300,000 <i>jin</i> tea ~240 Cost: unknown
1397	Transaction with Tibetans	1560 Cost: ~99,000 <i>pi</i> textiles
1399	Hezhou-Xinin-Taozhou	13,518 Cost: ~500,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1410	Hezhou	7714 Cost: 278,640 <i>jin</i> tea

^a Statistics provided in Serruys (1967) but cannot be verified in MSL.

^b Provided upon request.

^c Statistics provided in Serruys (1967) but cannot be verified in MSL.

^d Statistics provided in Serruys (1967) but cannot be verified in MSL.

^e Statistics provided in Serruys (1967) but cannot be verified in MSL.

^f Statistics provided in Serruys (1967) but cannot be verified in MSL.

^g Provided by private merchants to the Ming state.

^h Rossabi (1972) suggested that the horses were tributes from Turfan.

ⁱ Ibid

^j Insufficient information on the location of the market.

Table 4 Horse Trade in Second Era (1425–1550)

Year	Tribute Partner	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
Tribute Missions		
Korea		
1427	Korea	5000
1450	Korea	1477
1530	Korea	5
Central Asia		
1447	Hami	63
1460	Hami	9
1465	Hami	20
1465	Hami	200
Northeastern Tribes		
1443	Uriyangqad Mongols Taining	600
1470	Jurchens	700 (including mules)
1515	Uriyangqad Mongols Duoyan	10/1000 ^a
1521	Uriyangqad Mongols Taining	100
Mongols		
1428	Tartar—Arughtai	460
1430	Tartar—Arughtai	1280
1438	Oirat—Toghton	1583
1439	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	3725
1440	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	1647
1440	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	90
1442	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	2537
1444	Oirat—Toghto Bukha and Oirat—Esen	3092
1445	Oirat	800
1447	Oirat	4172
1447	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	63
1448	Oirat—Toghto Bukha	124
1450	Oirat—Esen	4400 (including camels)
1451	Oirat	329
1451	Oirat	3363
1452	Northern Bo-lai	~40,000 (including camels)
1462	Northern Bo-lai	129
1463	Northern Bo-lai	3000
1471	Northern Beg-arслан and the T'AI-TZU Bol(qu)	430
1472	Northern Bo-lai	85
1488	The Little King	4930 (including mules)
Horse Markets		
Northeastern Tribes		
1425	Guangning	82 Cost: unknown

Table 4 (continued)

Year	Tribute Partner	Number of Horses (<i>pi</i>)
1425	Guangning	465 Cost: unknown
Tibetans		
1432	Hezhou	~7700
1432	Hezhou	3296
1435	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	~13,000 Cost: ~1,097,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1435	Shaanxi	~1600 Cost: ~1600 cows and ~48,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1444	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	14,050 Cost: unknown
1447	Xining-Handong-AndingAduan-Quxian	2946 Cost: 125,430 <i>jin</i> tea
1450	Hezhou	1400 Cost: paid in huai salt
1461	Shaanxi	2000 Cost: ~70,000 taels
1472	Shaanxi	278 Cost: 5500 taels
1490	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	4000 Cost: ~400,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1508	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	~9000 Cost: ~782,000 <i>jin</i> tea
1543	Ningxia	2000 Cost: 26,000 taels

^a Two different versions of record found in MSL.

Table 5 Horse Trade in Third Era (1551–1644)

Year	Tribute Partner	Number of Horses (pi)
Northeastern Tribes		
1575	Uriyangqad Mongols	7
1604	Jurchen	352
1609	Jurchen	410
Mongols		
1551	Altan Khan	2
1551	Datong	2700 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1551	Xuanfu	~2000 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1551	Yansui-Ningxia	~5000 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1551	Datong-Xuanfu ^a	4771 (purchase) Cost: 8893 taels and 7000 pi cotton cloth
1571	Altan Khan	509
1571	Altan Khan	30/3000 ^b
1571	Ji-neng	700
1571	Datong ^c	1370 (purchase) Cost: 10,545 taels and additionally awarded 981 taels
1571	Datong ^d	726 (purchase) Cost: 4253 taels and additionally awarded 561 taels
1571	Xuanfu ^e	1993 (purchase) Cost: 15,277 taels and additionally awarded 800 taels
1571	Shanxi ^f	2941 (purchase) Cost: 26,400 taels and additionally awarded 1500 taels
1572	Altan Khan	250
1572	Ji-neng ^g	200
1572	Shanxi	2378 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1572	Datong	3562 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1573	Xuanfu	7810 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1573	Datong	7505 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1573	Shanxi	3788 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1574	Altan Khan	~500
1574	Altan Khan	1
1574	Xuanfu	11,500 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1574	Datong	7670 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1574	Shanxi	5000 (purchase) Cost: unknown

Table 5 (continued)

Year	Tribute Partner	Number of Horses (pi)
1575	Xuanfu	18,000 (purchase) ^h Cost: unknown
1575	Datong	10,000 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1575	Shanxi	10,000 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1578	Bing-tu ⁱ	10
1580	Bing-tu	8
1584	Shanxi	~104,400 (purchase) for past three years Cost: unknown
1592	Che-li-ke ^j	500
Tibetans		
1556	Xining-Hezhou-Taozhou	4700 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1571	Shaanxi	6370 (purchase) Cost: unknown
1601	Shaanxi	9600 (purchase) Cost: unknown

^a Trade with Altan Khan.

^b Two versions found in MSL.

^c Trade with Altan Khan.

^d Trade with Huang-Tai-ji, Bai-yao, and Wu-shen-bu.

^e Trade with Kun-du-li-ha, Yong-shao-bu, and Da-cheng-du.

^f Trade with Altan Khan, Duo-luo-tu-man, and Wei-wu-shen-bu.

^g The grandson of Bars-Bolod, active in Ordos, see Serruys (1958), note 12.

^h This could be a quota because there is an actual transaction recorded.

ⁱ The great grandson of Bars-Bolod, see Serruys (1958), note 36

^j The grandson of Altan Khan, see Serruys (1958), note 44

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