

Tribute and Tribute Missions Revisited

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Abstract

The term “tribute” had a strong presence in Western literature on China, as a result of Sino-European encounters in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. In these studies tribute was examined from the China angle. When views of the neighboring peoples are taken into consideration, it becomes evident that the smaller states in Inner Asia had not adopted the notion of China. A comparison with the practices of the Ottoman empire reveals that they also were using a strategy similar China. The paper suggests examining the practices of the smaller states in their own terms rather than in the shadow of the larger states.

Keywords

China-Qing dynasty, Inner Asian peoples, Silk Road countries, small state strategy, ritual

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The term “tribute” had a strong presence in Western literature on China, as a result of Sino-European encounters in the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries. The concept of tribute may have been useful as it represented a tangible tool for understanding an enigmatic China. It was with the writings of J.K. Fairbank and Teng Ssu-yü (1941) that tribute became a focal point of discussion.

In the words of Laura Newby (2005: 5):

it [tribute] was generally accepted as a theory which shaped the conduct of all relations between the Chinese empire and outsiders; not only did it serve the purpose of defense as well as commerce, but as reflected in a plethora of associated rituals, procedures, and terminology, it perpetuated the notion of China’s cultural superiority and represented an outward extension of the internal hierarchical social order.

Gradually this concept became the primary tool for interpreting historical China and her relations with the outside world. While its definition was one-sided, this was also its strength. It was, after all, referred to as a tribute *system*.

There were three important areas of foreign relations in Chinese history, two overland and one maritime: these were the relations with Inner Asia, with the south, and with the Western powers.

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The term “tribute” was first applied only for maritime trade, as sea-routes were the basis for the nineteenth century European encounter with China (Fairbank and Teng, 1941). In the 1960s it was acknowledged that China’s relations with the northern nomadic peoples had been crucial in shaping the views about relations with outsiders in history. Until those days, China specialists had been shaping their views on Inner Asia on the basis of Chinese sources. In the eyes of the China specialists, the nomadic people were perceived as a fierce group making inroads into China, and they therefore had to be stopped, and furthermore educated, and civilized by the Chinese. Ritual was the best medium for this kind of civilization process. Described as passive recipients of this civilizing approach carried out by China, Inner Asian peoples were referred to as “barbarians” in the works written in the 1940–1990s. For instance, Reischauer and Fairbank’s 1960 book *East Asia: The Great Tradition* speaks of barbarian invasions and barbarian challenges. Within such discourse, barbarians only had one recourse, and that was to tacitly accept the rules and regulations put forward by the Chinese court.

“Barbarian,” on the other hand, was a Greek term denoting the nomadic foreigners (Scythians) whose “blabber” was not easily understood. Starting with this challenge, the term “Scythians” went through different stages of interpretation. Later in history the name Scythians became a term for nomadic barbarians in the north of Asia. In the late 1960s, the Fairbank school was already questioning this approach (Fairbank, 1968a). Earlier, Owen Lattimore (1940) had been developing his views on Inner Asian frontiers without referring to these neighbors as barbarians. Instead he emphasized the difference in the lifestyle of nomads and sedentary people.

By 1968, in the introduction of *The Chinese World Order*, a work dealing with this issue over time and across different frontiers, Fairbank himself acknowledged the limitations of the views. Fairbank and his school took this challenge seriously. The world was quickly changing, and in their new book (1992) Fairbank and Merle Goldman no longer spoke of barbarians. This was a suitable decision as the term “barbarian” did not have a real Chinese language counterpart as a term that referred to all the different kinds of foreigners. On the contrary, in Chinese sources each of the neighboring people were referred to by a specific name, where they were, for example, grouped according to the four directions. Those in the north and northwest were called Rong, Di, and later Hu. The western neighbors were referred to as Rong, Yi, or people from the Western Regions. Those in the south were known as Man Yi. Europeans who came from the sea were called people from the Western Ocean or more popularly “Yang Guizi,” meaning ocean ghosts.

While all these different views about tribute and tributary relations with neighboring peoples were floating around, the discussion shifted to new aspects that had not been discussed earlier. First, the issue was raised as to whether the coastal experience was different from the overland experiences, and Joseph Fletcher showed that these two experiences were not different from one another as far as tribute was concerned (1968). In that sense, the debate shifted its axis to the question whether this holistic attitude – with no difference between the encounters at sea or overland – was temporal or continuous. The *Chinese World Order*, edited by Fairbank (1968), demonstrated that it was temporal, and that the notion and the practice of tribute changed over time. The conference volume edited by Morris Rossabi (1983) clearly demonstrated that China’s approach to relations with neighboring groups showed flexibility, as seen in her adoption of different criteria for domestic consumption and foreign relations. While the rhetoric of China’s superiority was maintained in the domestic sphere, a softer and more compromising tone was adopted for foreign relations, hence the title of the book, *China among Equals*. Later focusing on the practices of the Qing court, John Wills (1988) contributed to our understanding of pragmatism prevalent at the court.

The discussion on tribute and tribute missions continued to be focused on aspects of the internal mechanisms of its practice. In her study of the Lifanyuan (Court of Colonial Affairs), Ning Chia (1993) speaks of a decrease in the amount of tribute as requested by the Qing court, which was

balanced economically by a shift towards the border markets. Moreover, she also maintains that the notions of pre-Qing and Qing tributes were very different from one another (1993: 80). James Hevia, in his *Cherishing Men from Afar* (1995), gives us a complete overview of the different perceptions developed by modern scholars while at the same time emphasizing the role of ritual in the Qing encounter with England. This emphasis on ritual stands out as the information in the British and Chinese sources pertaining to this encounter demonstrate the differing perceptions of the two sides.

James Millward (1998) focuses on a different sphere and puts forward the view that tribute and trade were regarded as separate entities by the Chinese administration. He argues that some goods were tribute and therefore of ritualistic nature, and others were for trade depending on demand and supply. Millward's view is also supported by the reports of Nicolae Milescu Spathari who visited China in the late 1690s. Milescu speaks of the gifts for the emperor as separate from the goods exchanged on the market. Apparently, the Inner Asian merchants were well aware of these differences (Baddeley, 1919; Togan, 2022).

Using Manchu sources such as memorials of the Kyrgyz who were not tributary but in close interaction with the Qing court, Nicola Di Cosmo demonstrates that tribute for Qing was political and functioned to hold together "potentially centrifugal tendencies," even in cases where the people concerned were not "tributary." He also states that the Qing used the structure of the tribute system both for "direct military rule and indirect rule through the local elites." Di Cosmo further states (2003: 355, 365, 367) that the tribute environment

provided primarily an area of negotiation through which the imperial agents attempted to create a new social and political order – one leading to the encasement of old equilibria in a new reality functional to the preservation of Qing power in the region.

As a result, we see a difference in attitude towards tribute issues between the Qing center and the border areas. In other words, we again encounter a flexible approach, which in this case takes place not between equals, but among people where there was a clear hierarchy.

Most recently, Laura Newby (2005) provides an overall view of the changes in the perception of tribute and affirms that "the usefulness of the concept [of tribute I.T.] in relation to Ming-Qing practices has now been brought into question" (Newby, 2005: 6). Like Di Cosmo and Newby, an increasing number of scholars agree that the Qing should not be perceived as merely adopting the earlier Sino-centric views. Instead the main concern of the Qing rulers was to be recognized as legitimate universal rulers (Di Cosmo, 2003: 267, Newby, 2005: 5–10).

The present paper does not address the question from the Qing angle. It examines instead how the term was used by the outside world. In the following, the issue of tribute will be taken up in two different ways. First, the paper discusses how this practice was perceived by the neighboring Inner Asian peoples. Secondly, the paper examines similar attitudes in another imperial system, that of the Ottomans. What is interesting from a comparative historiographical perspective is that, in view of the vast literature on China, there are very few studies on the Ottomans. The studies extant are narratives of the ceremonies for receiving envoys (Alikılıç, 2002: 62–70; Arslantürk et al., 2012). While analytical studies of Chinese practices dominate the literature, why do we encounter a silence where the Ottomans are concerned? Is it a question of historiography, or could one perhaps surmise that because the Ottoman empire no longer exists, and the former territories belong now to different nation states, the rituals displaying power and superiority of the Ottomans may not be as relevant for present-day Ottoman historians?

In considering these questions, this paper first examines terminology and translation, and then looks at practices. Let us begin with the term "tribute," which is derived from Latin *tribuere*,

meaning to give, to distribute (as among the Roman tribes). Here we can see that the term originally denoted interaction among Roman tribes. In the feudal times it acquired a meaning that indicated obligations, dues from below. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* it is listed as follows:

- tribute* 1. A gift, payment, declaration or other acknowledgement of gratitude, respect or admiration.
2. a. The sum of money or other valuables paid by one ruler or nation to another as acknowledgement of submission or as the price of protection of that nation; b. any payment for protection.
3. a. In feudal times, any payment or tax given by a vassal to his overlord; b. the obligation involved in such a payment.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word enters the English language in the fourteenth century, and its use remains under the shadow of the terminology of the feudal times. The derived meaning of tribute is used as a translation of *lai gong* 來貢, *chao gong* 朝貢, or *jin gong* 進貢 in Chinese. In the case of China, in its origin, the term *gong* 貢 also harbors a hierarchical notion and seems to have referred to land dues offered to a superior. With state formation it acquired a centrist direction. For instance, grain sent from the south to the capital was referred to as “tribute grain.” In other words, the term was originally used domestically, and later came to be used in “international relations.” The relations with the outside world were influenced by this centrist tendency in addition to the notion of ideological center. This is how we are able to talk about “tribute” in China’s foreign relations when we speak in European languages.

As we can see, the use of the European term “tribute” for Chinese *gong* 貢 presents no problem and is a suitable translation of the term. However, we encounter a problem in cases where other cultures were involved, especially those who would have contact with China overland, or the so-called Silk Route countries. When we examine the eighteenth century *Wuti Qingwenjian* (a Qing dictionary in five languages) for the appropriate terminology in these languages, we see that *gong* 貢 (WTQWJ, 1957: 35a/479; Tamura et al., 1966: 1817) is rendered with a different word in each language, depending on the given social organization. It is not a blanket term like “tribute.” The Manchu term was *albabun*, which seems to be related to the Mongolian term *alba(n)*, which in turn denotes feudal-like obligations (Schurmann, 1956: 326). In the Mongolian language, it is not an ancient term and is not to be found in the *Secret History of the Mongols* of the thirteenth century (de Rachewiltz, 1972, Schurmann, 1956: 326). In the army of conquest of Chinggis Khan, following orders was the norm (rather than feudal obligations), so there was no need for such an expression. In the centuries following Chinggis Khan’s Mongolian empire, there was no army of conquest but people who emerged now in tribal groupings. In the post-Yuan situation and especially after the sixteenth century, Mongolian society and socio-political organization had changed, free Mongols had started to have obligations and to submit certain dues to their tribal leaders and princes (Sneath, 2007).¹ This later obligation was called *alban*, and the person who had to render these services and dues was called *albatu*. Schurmann says: “*alban* (or *alba*) meant not only the tributary obligations of a subject, but designated in general the relationship between subject and the lord” (Schurmann, 1956: 326–327). The term describes appropriately the vassal situation of the Mongols under the Qing rule in the eighteenth century: in this case it designated the relationship of the Mongolian subjects to the Qing emperor, their Qaghan (Elverskog, 2006). “This was because the rendering of tribute was not merely a financial transaction, but the expression of a bond of personal servitude on the part of the subject to his ruler” (Schurmann, 1956: 327).

Among the ancestors of present Uyghurs in Xinjiang, on the other hand, a different term was used. This term was *tartik*, “that which has been drawn to the presence of a ruler.” We find the same term being used in Ottoman Anatolia in relation to the Chinese emperor. Literary works talk

about the “precious items that had been presented to the Chinese court” (Togan, 1985). The Persian counterpart (also used by the Ottomans) of *tartik* was *peshkash* which is defined as “what is first drawn,” “a magnificent present such as is only presented to princes, great men, superiors, or sometimes to equals” (Steingass, 1892: 267a).

As is evident here, each Inner Asian culture was using a distinct term, and was not merely translating the Chinese *gong* 貢. Perceiving the interaction within one’s own cultural understanding, and therefore employing distinct terms, was the norm. It was in the same way that *gong* 貢 was translated as tribute into European languages with a feudal connotation. While the dictionary states that *albanbun* is the Manchu counterpart for *gong* 貢, the term for “presenting tribute” in Manchu was *alban jafambi* (Di Cosmo, 1997: 168). However, Qing documents written in Manchu from the frontier did not use the Manchu term but used instead the Turkic word *belek*, which simply has the meaning of a gift. A document from 1807 reads (Di Cosmo, 1997: 170–172 from Document 1):

Your humble servants Jin, Yi and Ai respectfully memorialize to inform Your Imperial Majesty that ambassadors have been sent from the Bek of Khokand, ‘Ālim, and came to present *belek*. Recently the Imperial Guard Šarhūda, of the military station of Karanggu, escorted the Khokand emissaries Maimet Nizar and Maimet Boba to meet Your humble servants. They knelt down and respectfully presented the following report.

Then follows a lengthy letter with a request for tax exemption. These officials at the frontier were apparently of Manchu origin and in the service of the Chinese emperor of the Qing dynasty. In theory, they could well have used the Manchu or for that matter the Chinese term. However, they used the Turkic term, as apparently this term was used in the letter from the Khoqandi ruler. It would seem that it was with a certain purpose that they used the word *belek*. It is important to note that Khoqand khanate that sent the envoys was not a vassal. In fact, this khanate was becoming increasingly stronger, and as an emerging power it was not projected to be a vassal in any time in the near future. Therefore their presents were not registered under a term of submission, although the ruler was using phrasing appropriate for submission (Di Cosmo, 1997: 167–168; Saguchi, 1965). The term *belek* was also used among Manchu officials denoting various gifts, as Milescu heard the term and used it in his report (Baddeley, 1919: 304).

The word *belek* simply meant “gifts” as Central Asians and the Ottomans did not have a general term which could be translated as “tribute.” The gifts or presents sent to rulers and received by rulers all had specific names which were important for societies where reciprocity was still the norm (Mauss, 1966). There were so many distinctions within gift-giving practices that a generalization would wipe out the nuances. What is interesting is that the Imperial Councilors resident in Kashgar also used the term *belek* in their letter as an acknowledgement of these gifts. They could well have used the word *gong* 貢 with the understanding that they had received the gifts as tribute, but they did not. The Khoqandi ruler was playing the game of “small-state strategy” in spite of his recent success through military gains and territorial expansion towards the west (Buchanan, 2010; Togan, 2013). It seems that the councilors in Kashgar were going along with that. At the same time, during the rule of the Khoqandi ruler ‘Ālim Khan (1798–1809), the territory of the khanate extended to Uratūbe, Kurama, Tashkent, Chimkent and the city of Turkestan (Yesi) in present day, northwestern Tajikistan, and southwestern Kazakhstan. His measures were so much detested by the tribal aristocracy that he was called Zalim Khan, meaning “the cruel ruler,” instead of “the scholarly ruler” which was the meaning of *‘ālim khan* (Bala, 1987). While ‘Ālim Khan had established a standing army consisting of 10 000 soldiers, composed of Tajiks and people of tribal background loyal only to himself, vis-à-vis the Chinese emperor he was playing the small-state strategy.

A few years later, we will see another Khoqand ruler speak of his dynasty's success in the same fashion by way of his envoy to the Ottoman court. The envoy who arrived at the Ottoman capital in 1839, sent by Muhammed 'Ali (Madali) Khan, was just reporting about this success, while speaking with great respect (in a subdued tone) of both the Ottoman and the Chinese rulers. When he was asked about certain sections of the letter sent by the Khoqand ruler (and preserved in state archives of Turkey), his response was as follows:²

The lands under the domination of our Khan reach on one side Bukhara, on the other China (Chin u Machin) and the other side extend towards Russia. We are always in a peaceful relationship with Bukhara. China, on the other hand, is only at war if it is attacked from outside. Otherwise, if nobody marches towards their land, their custom has been not to attack lands outside of their lands. Although the seven cities like Kashgar and Khoten are under Chinese domination, Muslim judges³ are being appointed *by us* [italics added] and the Khaqan of China makes annually a large amount of a payment to us as a way of "warding off of evil." This all happens because they do not wish that there is any strife over there. Only for some time now the Russian state has been luring some of the *töre* (princes) and khans in the Dasht-i Kipchak to her side by making payment of money. Others recognize our Khan as their overlord and *pay their zakat (dues) to him*⁴ [italics added]. There are yet others who do not show any inclination to any side and roam around by themselves.

The Khoqandi ruler Madali Khan (1822–1842) "petitioned" the Ottoman Sultan for a title which would make him "Khan of Khans in Ferghana, in the Kazakh Steppe (*Dasht-i Kipchak-i Kazakiyye*), and among the Alay Kyrgyz." The khan was additionally requesting that the Ottoman Sultan should advise the tribal leaders (*ilat*) and lesser khans lording it over the steppe and not recognizing anybody as their overlord to recognize the khanate of Khoqand. As a last item, the khan asked for the title "Khan of tribes (*iller khani*)" for his son who was then 12 years old. The small-state strategy is apparent in his request that the Ottoman Sultan should advise the tribal leaders and lesser khans in Central Asia to recognize the Khoqandi ruler. The Ottoman Sultan in 1839 was Abdülmecid, who was busy appeasing the Western powers with his westernization policies. He could have not cared less for the tribal leaders in Central Asia. These people were the leaders of nomadic tribes over whom even Central Asian leaders could not exercise authority. Even if he had wanted to, the Ottoman sultan was too far away. Moreover, Ottoman policy towards tribes had never been favorable. The notion of distance was a useful one and had also been raised as a pretext by the Ottoman Sultan in 1820 when the Bukharan ruler made the request to become a vassal (HCAOD: 62 doc. 20). Later during the reign of Abdülhamid, the Ottoman state followed an active Islam in China policy (Kuzuoğlu, 2013: 124, 127–133).

Another aspect of this small-state strategy was the cynicism and sarcasm shown by the Khoqandi ruler as he referred to their own activities as causing evil and to themselves as evil-doers. The tone of this statement seems to refer to experiences spread over many centuries. At that time, the Khoqandis were opting the Kyrgyz at about the same time by bringing them under control. The Kyrgyz rank and file were incorporated into the Khoqandi army. In this way the Kyrgyz who had been threatening the security of the trade routes were made partners, which was also a way of "warding off evil," but the Khoqandi ruler did not use sarcasm when it came to serious internal affairs. Small-state strategy was used against the outside and against the big powers like Ottoman Empire or Qing China. We encounter a similar situation in the seventeenth century (1655) when the Muslim envoy Kebeg coming from Yarkent was questioned at the newly established Qing court about certain irregularities. His answer was: "Small countries like us do not know the rules and rites of big countries," and asked for understanding (see Bao and Qi, 1998: 694).

In this Khoqandi document, the khan is also asking for help to train soldiers according to new techniques and for possible books on that subject. As we understand, this envoy stayed in Istanbul from August 1838 to March 1839, i.e. for eight months.⁵ Most probably they were carrying out commercial activities, but there are also hints about intellectual exchange.

From this archival document we can see the aspirations of the ruler of Khoqand and also his way of describing the situation then. But one of the most important aspects is that the question of a “stipend” is being confirmed here. In her work studying the details of relations between the Qing empire and Khoqand, Laura Newby deals with the issue of stipend in great detail. As there is no direct information in the Chinese documents, she finds that the information about stipend cannot be confirmed (Newby, 2005: 58–70). Here in this document, however, it is stated that this is an annual payment in cash.⁶

The Khoqandi ruler Madali Khan (Muhammed ‘Ali), who sent Zahid Khoja as an envoy to the Ottoman court, ruled twenty years between 1822 and 1842. In 1835 he had managed what Joseph Fletcher calls “China’s first uneven treaty” gaining concessions (2008: 375–385), and in 1839 he was at the peak of his career. In his detailed study, Fletcher (2008: 383) has demonstrated that these developments later led to the Qing response to coastal trading powers in 1842–43. Madali Khan was so overwhelmed by his success that he wanted to announce it to the faraway Ottoman Court. There we have seen him mentioning these gains as if the relations with China had always been in his favor. The right to appoint his own man to oversee conflicts that is the appointment of the *qadi* had been achieved over long struggles. In fact, nearly the whole account by Fletcher (2008: 360–385) deals with the rule of Madali Khan, although Madali’s name is not mentioned but is alluded to as “Khoqand” or “Khoqand ruler.”

Although there is yet no textual evidence, the khan himself must have invested in trade as Chinggis Khan and his descendants had done earlier in the thirteenth century. As we know from Madali Khan’s letter, he was also collecting taxes from both from the merchants as well as from nomads. In both cases, these taxes are referred to as *zakat*.⁷ The rates of these taxes were also determined by Madali Khan. We can see that it was profitable for the merchants, and that they were willing to leave their families behind and reside abroad as agents of the Khanate. It seems, however, that there was competition among these merchants dealing with the China trade. According to Kilic-Schubel (2011), those merchants associated with the Makhdumzada branch of the Sufi order Naqshbandiyya felt threatened by Madali Khan’s policies and incited the ruler of Bukhara against Madali Khan. In the ensuing intervention by the Bukharan ruler, the city of Khoqand was destroyed. But more importantly, most of the elite (apparently those supporting Madali Khan) were eliminated. Within this turmoil, in 1842 Madali Khan, his son, and his mother were killed. Kilic-Schubel finds the queen mother’s peacemaking policies presented a threat for the merchants associated with the Makhdumzades. This was the end of Khoqand whose ruler had sent an envoy to the Ottoman Court requesting titles for himself and his son, the heir apparent to be.

The Ottoman state, or the Porte as it was called in Europe, was herself paying off the Arab tribes so that they would not attack the Hajj caravans. But by the imperial state, this payment was referred to as compensation for food (Faroqhi, 1990: 75–78). Ottoman practices can be compared to China in other respects as well. For example, the Ottomans were very keen on observing rules for diplomacy and ritual. Like the Chinese Ministry of Rites (*Libu*), the Ottoman administration emphasized observation of former practices (HCAOD: 55, doc. 18). The high officials in the Ottoman empire also made a clear distinction between envoys arriving with formal letters from their rulers and those who were passing by, for instance while going to Hajj. In a document from 1827, it is stated that as the envoy was not on a diplomatic mission but on his way to Hajj, he should be treated appropriately (HCAOD: 99 doc. 34). Issues of trade were also treated separately from diplomacy (HCAOD: 244 doc. 95).

Audience was permitted only after careful examination of the letters brought by the envoys. If the envoy wanted to deliver some information orally, then instructions were given to investigate the matter thoroughly. In other words, no oral communication was possible without prior knowledge (HCAOD: 157, doc. 56; Aslantürk et al., 2012: 109–118). This information gives us a clue to understand how the Russian envoy Spathari Milescu, who as a Rumanian had been raised in a dependency of the Ottoman empire and went over to the Russian court later on, was manipulating the situation using his expertise with the Ottomans. In the late 1690s he had been sent by the Russian Tsar as an envoy to China. The Qing high officials were requesting that he hand over the Tsar's letter. He was told that he would be granted an audience only after the examination of the letter by the Grand Council. Milescu, on the other hand, objected to this proposal by referring to the Ottomans (Baddeley, 1919: 336):

And the Tsar now wishes the Bogdikhan [Kangxi Emperor] to show his friendship and love and not treat him in the same way as the Portuguese and the Dutch, who, compared to his Majesty [the Russian Tsar] are but petty potentates. Let him do as the Caesar of Rome and other Christian monarchs or the Sultan of Turkey and Shah of Persia who receive his Majesty's letters themselves.

Milescu refers to the Ottomans as great monarchs at different occasions. In these documents dealing with Central Asian khanates of the nineteenth century, we see that the Ottoman administration was going along with minor requests, like asking for religious books. In one case the Sultan gave orders that the requested books be purchased, and if they could not be purchased, then copies from the imperial library should be given (HCAOD: 89, doc. 30). One would assume that there must have been different copies of these books in the imperial library. In matters involving diplomatic issues, however, they examined the issue much more carefully and did not respond favorably to each request. In 1865, when Khoqand was invaded by the Bukharan Khanate, it was decreed that the Khoqandi envoys residing in Istanbul could not be given an official audience, as apparently they were not representing any ruler (HCAOD: 221, doc. 85). Moreover, whenever Central Asian khanates of Bukhara, Khoqand, and Khiva requested help from the Ottoman Court, the distances involved were presented as an excuse (HCAOD: 221 doc. 85), but in the internal correspondence it was made clear that any move that had the potential of harming friendly relations with Russia was not advisable (HCAOD: 34 doc. 10, 64 doc. 21, 221 doc. 85).

Envoys coming from Central Asia were treated on friendly terms, given daily allowances, room, and board in the households of eminent statesmen. However, when the situation concerned issues of international order and imperial security, then these friendly relations became a secondary issue.

Central Asian rulers wrote their letters in Persian, Ottoman Sultans, on the other hand, wrote their letters in Ottoman Turkish and appended them with Persian translations. Here again one can observe that close relations based on cultural and religious affinity were always taken into consideration unless it was a matter of international concern. Central Asian rulers' gifts to the Sultan were called *hedaya*, "gift, present," from the Arabic. The envoys were given further gifts in return. But there was not a word of *kharaj* which would be a translation of "tribute" because *kharaj* was received from non-Muslims.⁸

When the Ottomans were dealing with non-Muslim rulers like the Europeans, then the whole enterprise was different. Their envoys were received with great pomp at different stations or cities (Topaktaş, 2015). At the entrance to the capital, they were also met by other foreign envoys resident in Istanbul. If they were coming from German-speaking countries, they would be taken to Nemçe Hani "The German Inn." They would be given guards to protect them as envoys as they were carrying armor, an act forbidden for non-Muslims. The items that they brought to present the Sultan were regarded by the Ottoman court as *kharaj*, "tribute." Adam Wenner, who came in the German

diplomatic mission to Istanbul and resided there for 11 months (August 1616 to July 1617), has left us with a record of his travels. He tells us that “the presents that we bring as a sign of friendship” are called *kharaj* in Turkish (Wenner, 2011: 60).⁹ He does not use the word for tribute for their own gifts either. Apparently, this was a widely known practice used by European states like Venice or Ragusa (Dubrovnik) in their dealings with the Ottomans.¹⁰ On the other hand, we have seen above that the Khoqandi ruler was referring to tribute offered to Central Asian leadership as *zakat*.

The examples above provide a true record of the different languages used for the same phenomenon, which had been referred to as tribute. Therefore, we have to be careful in generalizing and reading a given event through the lens of our own socialization. Earlier (1980s), under the light of the studies carried out in English, I had translated the Chinese term *gong* 貢 with the Ottoman term *kharaj* (1980, 1985 and 2000). At that time I did not realize that even this Islamic term did not have the same meaning in all Muslim countries. First it evolved as a tax, then it was a land tax, under the Ottomans it was a land tax taken from non-Muslims. By the same token, non-Muslim rulers who were vassals would pay a fixed amount of land-tax. And this fixed amount of land tax from non-Muslim countries came to be called *kharaj*, so that it was also used for the non-Muslim Germans who were not vassals.

What kind of methodology should be adopted in cases like this? As mentioned above, the English term “tribute” as a translation of the Chinese term *gong* 貢 does not present problems. But such a translation becomes more problematic when referring to the practice from documents written in Central Asian languages or Ottoman Turkish. We can either leave the term in the local language or explain fully what the translated term meant at a specific time. The timing is important, as at present the term *haraç* in modern Turkish means extortion. We do not want to say that *Central Asian envoys brought extortions to China*. While this may sound funny in English, it would not be considered humorous at all in Turkish. Therefore, I would suggest that using local terminology like *tartik*, *belek* would be more appropriate.¹¹ One important point is to be very cautious with using terms that are already translations, as in the case of *haraç* (<*kharaj*) as the original word is actually Arabic. When the Chinese *gong* 貢 is translated into English as tribute and then translated into another language, we can encounter double or even triple translations, for example Chinese > English > Arabic > Turkish, leading to misunderstanding and clichés.

As can be seen, for conducting historical studies, the use of primary sources is not sufficient, contextualization of terminology in the original text and in the translated language are important steps. Any intermediates should be used with great caution and with a consciousness of their own context. But we could not come to these conclusions only by studying the use of *gong* 貢 in Chinese history, without making use of the tools of comparative history.

Large states had their own terminology – *gong* 貢, *kharaj* – showing their own sense of superiority. Although the content of these terms supposedly acknowledging the supremacy of the large states changed, terminology remained constant. Small states which employed the strategy of the weak, on the other hand, were flexible in terms of the kinds of terminology they employed. Rather than being keen on one specific term, they could use different words and phrases depending on the region, time, and occasion. Small states also understood the large-state strategy, and went along with their requirements.¹² Local rulers were resourceful and brought different issues to the forefront. Official visits of the small states to the large states were motivated by the competition among themselves, by the observance of the Inner Asian custom of *körünüş* “audience”¹³ and of course by their own needs.

Notes

1. The famous Russian Mongolist Vladimirtsev was most probably influenced by these later practices when he described 12–13th century Mongols as feudal.

2. The Ottoman Archives of the Prime Minister's Office (BOA), Hatt-i Hümayun, 36565-A (Sarmay, 2004: 41), see HCAOD: 157–158, doc. 56.
3. Di Cosmo 1997: 169, Fletcher 2008: 38.
4. It is to be noted that here the direction of *zakat* goes from lower status to higher status, while in the usual practice it is just the reverse. Apparently the Khoqandis were using the term for taxation received from Muslims. As Zysow's article "Zakāt" in EI² demonstrates, the term *zakāt* was used both in the meanings of alms and of revenue.
5. In HCAOD there are about 13 documents dealing with the sojourn of the envoy.
6. The payment of cash (stipend) was also mentioned by Joseph Fletcher, most probably on the basis of Central Asian sources.
7. The usage of the term *zakat* needs further investigation whether it was a term used in all Central Asian khanates. Devin DeWeese speaks of *zakat* that the Kyrgyz tribes were regularly paying (DeWeese, 2011: 145).
8. For *kharaj* as an Islamic tax, see Cahen's "Kharaj", Lambton's "Kharadj II. In Persia", and Orhonlu's "Kharadj II. In Ottoman Turkey", in EI².
9. The same complaint is made by Miclescu in regard to the Qing court (Baddeley, 1919: 337).
10. Maurice Aymard, oral communication.
11. For additional terms such as *tiyish* used in the Golden Horde and the Crimean Khanates, see Ivanics 1994.
12. There is an interesting article by Buchanan 2010 on contemporaneous small-state strategies, an entity emerging after the end of the Cold War. I am grateful to Bahar Rumelili for this reference.
13. For *körünüsh* "audience", see Doerfer 1975: no. 1723.

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