

## Study on the Xiejia of Xunhua Office in the Qing Dynasty

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**Abstract:** In the north-western region of the Qing dynasty, the Xunhua office, with Tibetans as the main body, set up many Xiejia. Based on the special social environment, it was used as a medium for trade between different ethnic groups and was endowed with multiple government functions to achieve national power to control of grassroots society, this kind of institution setting different from the mainland which can be regarded as a unique phenomenon in ethnic areas. This article explores the origin, type, function and other aspects of Xiejia of Xunhua office in order to better understand the northwest of the Qing dynasty grassroots society in ethnic areas.

### 1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, with the development of regional history research, the academic community has paid more and more attention to the history of the unevenly developed and ethnically diverse areas inhabited by Chinese ethnic minorities. With the excavation, sorting and utilization of archives and documents of the Xunhua office in the Qing dynasty in recent years, more people have been able to pay attention to and understand the social features of the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in the northwest of the Qing dynasty. The Xunhua office in the Qing dynasty was a first-level administrative unit in the administrative system of Gansu Province. It was not only a grassroots unit of the country's formal administrative system, but also constituted a local institution for the country to implement special ethnic policies. The jurisdiction of the Xunhua office in the Qing dynasty is roughly located in the Tibetan-inhabited areas of Gansu and Qinghai provinces in China today. It is a typical transitional zone where Tibetans, Hans, Mongolians, and Huis live in mixed ethnic groups, with multicultural characteristics. The so-called Xiejia was originally a broker who was proficient in Mongolian and Tibetan. At the beginning of the rise of the Mongolian-Tibetan trade in the Qing dynasty, merchants and the Mongolian and Tibetan people were unable to trade directly, because of language barriers, and they hired Xiejia to buy and sell. Based on the special cultural and geographical environment of the Xunhua office in the Qing dynasty, many Xiejia of Xunhua office had more special functions and roles, and formed a unique system, which was of great significance to the stability and development of ethnic areas.

### 2. The Origin of Xiejia of Xunhua Office

Regarding Xiejia, it was generally accepted that its basic nature was a hotel, and it also emphasized that it was different from the hotel due to the concurrent operation of various businesses and emphasizes the combination of its shop and broker business. The Xiejia in the Han-Tibetan confluence area was the most special one. The earliest time when it came into being. Early studies believed that it originated during the Qing dynasty during the Daoguang period. Recent studies suggest that it occurred at the latest during the Hongzhi era of the Ming dynasty. Xiejia of Xunhua office evolved from an intermediary who was proficient in the language of several local ethnic groups and was proficient in trade knowledge when the tea-horse traded. Mongolian and Tibetan merchants stayed at Xiejia's house for the first time. If there was no special reason, they still had to stay at Xiejia's house next time. People who worked as staff in Xiejia sometimes went out to do business. When they arrived in the Tibetan area, they also lived in the merchant's house, which further enhanced the host-guest friendship between them and established a mutually trusting trade relationship. Oftentimes the bulk of the Sino-Tibetan trade in history was achieved through the

Xiejia's intermediaries. After Yongzheng Emperor suppressed the riot caused by Luobozangdanjin, in order to strengthen the control of the Sino-Tibetan region, the government led the establishment of such institutions with hereditary characteristics, specifically engaged in the communication of local governments and Tibetans, which was an indispensable intermediary, not only to collect grain tax, and on this basis, extending the functions of assisting the government to check the household, acting as a translator and consultant in judicial activities, investigating cases, mediating social disputes, and prohibiting trade, etc., which played an active role in order to keep stability in the region.

### **3. Types of Xiejia of Xunhua Office**

There are two types of Xiejia: official Xiejia and private Xiejia. The so-called official Xiejia was a hereditary service in the grassroots government of the Qing dynasty. It was an intermediary who represented the official in commercial trade with the Tibetan people. They were actually the local people who took in charge of money and food. Although it was not a formal official service in the government, the license was issued by an official to carry out various official functions. On one hand, it represented the local Mongolian and Tibetan people to undertake the errands of the government, on the other hand, it also represented the government in the Mongolian and Tibetan areas. The Xiejia of Xunhua office were mostly of this kind. They were not entirely commercial entities. They were middlemen who managed Tibetans in the local government of the Qing dynasty. Hui-Hans mainly served as Xiejia who spoke Tibetan and Chinese and were responsible for taxation. Although food was a contractual nature, it was still beneficial. The Xiejia of Xunhua office was mostly responsible for the government service, and undertook the dual tasks of business and official affairs, not only buying and selling goods, but also urging the grain tax to serve the government.

The so-called private Xiejia that was, the Han people and the Muslims who were proficient in Tibetan in the Sino-Tibetan region often acted as translators for the Mongolian and Tibetan people. As the wool trade gradually developed, it became the middle merchant. Relative to the Xiejia, they were less involved in the public affairs of the government. They made up only a small fraction of Xunhua office, however they made up a big chunk in Dangaer office. Mongolian and Tibetan people often gave fur and other items to them for resale to foreign merchants, and repurchased the necessary living materials. Also foreign merchants often entrusted them to purchase fur and other goods. They generally did not have an official trade name, but the familiar Mongolian and Tibetan people had fixed clients for them.

The government of the Qing dynasty strictly regulated the people engaged in Xiejia's activities. Whether it was an official Xiejia or a private Xiejia, they all created a roster, which was controlled and supervised by the government, so as to better handle trade and public affairs between multi-ethnic settlements.

### **4. The Functions of Xiejia of Xunhua Office**

Xiejia of Xunhua office was mainly an official Xiejia. It was characterized by familiarity with multi-ethnic languages, local folk customs, and a good and stable relationship with local ethnic groups. Based on these advantages, the government office of Xunhua office had to give them more functions when dealing with civil affairs and judicial affairs. Similarly, when local ethnic groups entered the city to engage in activities related to public affairs and trade, they also needed them as translators. The function of Xiejia of Xunhua office had diversified characteristics.

#### **4.1 Assisting the Government to Check the Account**

Ever since the Yongzheng era of the Qing dynasty promoted taxation, that was, taking the land area as the standard for expropriation of land, the same was true of the Xunhua office. At that time, demographic changes in agricultural production would directly affected local grain production, and thus affect the expropriation of farmland. Therefore, the change of household registration would cause Xiejia to attach great importance to it and make audits and investigations, and then made a

timely report to the government.

#### **4.2 Acting as a Translator and Consultant in Judicial Activities**

There were many Tibetans in the area under the jurisdiction of Xunhua office, and there were different ethnic groups such as Mongolian, Han, and Hui. Local people generally believed in Tibetan Buddhism, and their education is relatively backward. Most of them were Tibetan-based temple education. There were very few local people who understood Chinese and Chinese characters. Similarly, the main officials of the Xunhua office's government, who were deeply educated by Confucianism, basically did not understand Tibetan. Based on the practical reasons for communication barriers, the Xiejia's involvement in the judicial field had become a medium for Tibetans and government officials in litigation, thus playing the role of language translation, case description, and uploading and issued. A large number of files were translated in dialects kept in the archives of the Xunhua office of Qing dynasty in the Qinghai Archives are now translated and consulted by many Xiejia at that time.

#### **4.3 Assisting the Government to Investigate the Case**

After the Xiejia participated in translation and consultation in judicial activities, it also participated in the summoning of the accused, witnesses, and case investigations. Most of them were sent by the government to investigate, verify the specific situation, and do some related inspections. These jobs actually belonged to the category of judicial activities which was involved in public power.

#### **4.4 Assisting the Government to Mediate Social Disputes**

The particularity of the Xunhua office policy on minority groups in the Qing dynasty manifested in the judicial field that the handling of various cases was not based on the *Law of the Qing Dynasty* but on Tibetan customary law, which was conducted under the mediation of the intermediary between the parties deal with. The Xiejia often acted as intermediaries to mediate and handle various social disputes.

#### **4.5 Assisting the Government to Inspect Trade**

Xiejia of Xunhua office was itself a trade intermediary, involved in the business field between different ethnic groups, but its scale of concurrent business was not large, which was also related to the Qing government's control of the national food and tea trade. The Xiejia often had the responsibility of assisting the government to inspect the trade to prevent the local private sale of food, tea and other prohibited items.

### **5. Conclusion**

The territory of the Qing dynasty was vast, and there were many areas in the northwest minority area that were difficult for government forces to penetrate, and the governance model was often different from that of the interior. The many Xiejia established by the Xunhua office embodies the different paths of state power's penetration and control of grassroots society in ethnic areas. The Xunhua office used the Xiejia as an agent to make it an important reliance on the government to communicate with the grassroots society in ethnic areas. It was often endowed with a wide range of government functions, which was included in the government management system and assists the government. Dealing with all kinds of problems had the positive significance of advancing the power of the state to the grassroots society. On the other hand, it also objectively blocked the direct contact between the state and the broad masses, divided the country's political identity resources, and led to the negative impact of the loss of state authority. A series of abuses appeared during the period of the Republic of China in the late Qing dynasty, which should also be used as a reference.

## References

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