The Status of Research on Kublai Khan in China

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Abstract

This article aimed to investigate the state of knowledge about Emperor Kublai Khan of China. The documentary research method is used to study articles which were published in China from 2000 to 2014.

The study revealed Autonomous Region in which there were totally 43 Kublai Khan related papers, most of which were from Mongolia and the province of Yunnan. The content of those publications primarily focused on politics using the frameworks of Marxism and Nationalism. The main discipline was, at the beginning, only History. Philosophy and Ethnics studies about Kublai Khan attracted scholars’ interest in the later time. The documents used in the studies were found to be from the Yuan dynasty chronicles written during the Ming dynasty. It is recommended that ASEAN countries should have more research about Emperor Kublai Khan.

Keywords: Kublai Khan, China, state of knowledge

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Background

Emperor Kublai Khan (A.D. 1215-1294) was the Khan or the Mongol emperor, and also the first emperor of the Yuan Dynasty of China. Kublai Khan was the grandson of Genghis Khan who was one of the greatest emperors of world history.

Kublai Khan was the first emperor of the Yuan Dynasty of China in 1271, and also was the first Mongol to rule China. He was respected by lots of Mongol people and the Huns. It was said that the Yuan Dynasty became the most prosperous under the reign of Kublai Khan. His important accomplishment was the annexation of the Kingdom of Dali and made Dali a part of China. He also expanded the boundary into many areas, and even sent his armies to assail Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

For this reason, Kublai Khan was not only the emperor who developed and revealed the new China, but he was also a very important figure of Southeast Asia and global history. Accordingly, studying and doing research about Kublai Khan, the Emperor of China, is very essential. It will show various aspects of the society of the Dynasty in the first period. Thus, it is necessary to study publications regarding Kublai Khan, the Emperor of China, in 2000-2014 in order to open new perspectives which will benefit academic circle in Thailand.

Objectives/Research Questions

To investigate the state of knowledge about Kublai Khan, the Emperor of China.

Research Methodology

This study investigated historical events from Chinese publications. It covered both academic articles which were published in national journals and theses which were published in 2000-2014, 43 articles in total. This study was divided into 2 parts: 1. The publications regarding the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai Khan (1252-1271), and 2. The publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai Khan (1271-1294).
Findings

1. The publications regarding the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai Khan (1252-1271)

There were 10 publications regarding the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai, and the issues which were investigated are as follows:

- The War between the Yuan Dynasty and the Kingdom of Dali (7 articles)

Publications concerning the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai that mentioned the war between the Yuan Dynasty and the Kingdom of Dali are mainly studied. The researchers were also interested in other issues, such as the historical meaning of the elimination of the Kingdom of Dali in the Yuan Dynasty under Kublai Khan’s reign, the purposes of assailing the Kingdom of Dali in Kublai Khan’s reign, and the investigation of new evidences of the route that Kublai Khan’s armies marched to invade the Kingdom of Dali.

One interesting fact was that even though the Kingdom of Dali was defeated and became a part of China, it was undeniable that the invasion was unjust. However, for many Chinese scholars who were nationalistic, they considered the invasion worthy of being remembered and the greatest contribution of Kublai Khan. For example, Fang Tie said, “The conquest over the Kingdom of Dali of Kublai Khan ended the disunion between many ethnic groups which had occurred more than hundred years. Yunnan region became a part of China, and it brought back peace and prosperity. Finally, Yunnan was officially raised its status to be a province.” (Fang Tie, 2011). This idea was similar to Shi Jianjun’s opinion who mentioned that, “The history showed us that the good administration of Yunnan region is a very precious heritage for next generation of Chinese descendants. More importantly, Kublai Khan led and ruled Yunnan which was the important part under Centralization since then until present.” (Shi Jianjun, 2005). Bao Yuqing mentioned that, ”The invasion and administration of Mongol people had the positive meaning to the stability of the region, the development of Southwest area of China, and it also supported the unity between different ethnic groups.” (Bao Yuqing, 2004).

1.1. The Usurpation (3 articles)

The usurpation was when Emperor Kublai stole the throne from Ariq Böke who was his older brother. According to AoRigele’s study, it showed that, “Even in election regulations of the Mongol’s Kurultai system or in China’s tradition of using jade seals
represent the King's authority, Kublai Khan's usurpation was considered completely against all the rules and tradition. Usurpation was just a benefit of using force in the war.” (AoRigele, 2013). In addition, Zhao Lianwen analyzed this victory using the framework of Marx's theory that, “Kublai Khan’s victory showed that the more advanced production and relation of production would definitely defeat the underdeveloped production and relation of production.” (Zhao Lianwen, 2007)

To sum up, all the publications regarding the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai focused on politics and administration. In history field, it is found that main evidence is the Yuan Dynasty Annals and other evidences are information from various books and articles of neighboring countries and many ethnic groups that lived in the areas where the events took place, such as the Mongol history and Pai people.

2. The publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai (1271-1294)

There were 33 publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai, and the issues which were investigated are as follows:

2.1. Kublai Khan's Policies (11 articles)

There were papers that mentioned about policies in Kublai Khan's reign, such as economic policy, culture policy, ethnic policy. The Huns’ policies were adapted to apply in this period as well.

The most interesting was the economic policy. Hai Ri summarized that, “They supported agriculture and commerce by changing the use of coins to use banknotes in the country instead. As a result, this policy made the Yuan Dynasty under the reign of Kublai Khan prospered, and it was one of the greatest eras in China history.” (Hai Ri, 2009)

2.2. Kublai Khan's Administration Concept (7 articles)

There were many papers written about Kublai Khan's administration concept in many aspects, such as the concept of religion, the concept of Confucius, flexible thinking system, and so on. Wang Yu refered to Kublai Khan's concept of administration using Marxism as the research tool, and it could be summarized that, “The origin of Emperor Kublai Khan was the Mongol and he also took the concept of the Huns and the Confucius. These two concepts set the concept of Kublai Khan that considered everything was always changing, and never stops moving.” (Wang Yu, 2007). Xing Feng also agreed that, “Kublai Khan was familiar with the Mongol’s ways of thinking and he also understood
the concept of Tibetan Buddhism and the Confucius concept very well. He could adapt those two concepts to use in the administration.” (Xiu Feng, 2012)

2.3. The Relation Between the Yuan Dynasty and Other Kingdoms (2 articles)

The relation between the Yuan Dynasty and Chenla Kingdom and Korea was mentioned in many publications. The interesting thing was that Xue Lei presented the relation between China and Korea through the perspective of Korean highest ruler at that time. “At first, Korean ruler considered China a good company. However, Korea was concerned about Japanese pirates (Wokou) thus Korea opposed any relationship between China and Japan. The two countries started a war in the later time. Korean ruler wanted to strengthen his power; therefore, he decided to support the war between China and Japan”. (Xue Lei, 2002)

2.4. Wars between the Dynasty and Other Kingdoms (6 articles)

Another interesting issue after Kublai Khan had occupied China completely was wars between kingdoms at that time. The Dynasty of Wan fought with Japan, Vietnam, and Burma. Especially, the war between the Yuan Dynasty and Japan was interested by citizens because the war against Japan caused China lots of damages and a lot of Chinese people were injured and dead. Then the relation between China and Japan became a very sensitive issue in China society because The Yuan Dynasty was defeated. Scholars have studied the reasons that caused China political and military failure. Gao Xiaooyan and Quan Maiying revealed new perspective by studying the defeat using ethnology theory as a framework. “Apart from the Mongol and the Huns, the army consisted of soldiers who were from various ethnic groups. Most of the soldiers who were from other ethnic groups were prisoners of war. They were treated differently from other soldiers. It caused dissatisfaction to those soldiers, and there was also misunderstanding among the soldiers because of the differences of languages. It had a very big impact to the war.” (Gao Xiaooyan Quan Maiying, 2011)

2.5. The Relation Between Kublai Khan and the Important Figures in the Era (4 articles)

There were two important figures mentioned which were Master Pasipia and Gen, the Heir of China. Three works of Master Pasipia were investigated for the evidence that could identify the time and factors that caused the relation as mentioned.

2.6. Other Issues (3 articles)
There was a research mentioned about the capital changing in Kublai Khan's reign, the treason in the country and the hobbies of Emperor Kublai Khan. It was the only research that is not written about politics and administration directly. Huang Chenghua divided and analyzed Kublai Khan's hobbies as, “The construction of luxurious palace and palace full of green. Hunting animals and watching animals. Visiting and explore new places and things. Watching beautiful traditional dances. It showed that Kublai Khan was not only a strong emperor but he was also a gentle person. Emperor had different hobbies from normal people, and these hobbies became the symbol of the emperor's dignity.” (Huang Chenghua, 2011)

To sum up, the publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai mainly focused on politics and administration. There was only one research that is not written about politics and administration directly. The majors that study this topic were mostly history major followed by philosophy major and ethnology major. The evidences which were investigated were the Yuan Dynasty's annals and other information from books and articles of neighboring countries and various ethnic groups which lived in the area the event took place, such as Japanese, and Korean history books, and so on.

In conclusion, in this investigation, it was found that there were 43 Chinese publications regarding Emperor Kublai during 2000-2014. 42 researches mainly focused on politics and administration, and the other one focused on Kublai Khan's hobbies which was not related to politics and administration directly.
The details and the number of publications are shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main issue</th>
<th>Minor issues</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics and Administration</td>
<td>The usurpation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wars between the Yuan Dynasty and other kingdoms</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Policies in the reign of Kublai Khan</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kublai Khan’s administration concept</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The relation between the Yuan Dynasty and other kingdoms</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The relation between Kublai Khan and the important figures in the era</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The change of capital in Kublai Khan’s era</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The treason in the reign of Kublai Khan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Kublai Khan’s hobbies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The publications are mostly from Mongolia’s autonomous region and Yunnan province of China. Mongolia’s autonomous region is the area that the Mongol have lived since the past until present. Yunnan province was the area where the Yuan invaded and made the Kingdom of Dali a part of China. This shows that people are close and bound with the area that the events took place, and it makes people interested in studying the history.

The major that studies about this topic is mostly history major. Philosophy major and ethnology major also started to study about Emperor Kublai. It is not only history major that study about this topic anymore. This topic is becoming wide-open and more interdisciplinary.

Most of the researchers aimed to study dimensions of politics and administration using Marx’s theory and ethnic theory as the framework. Kublai Khan was considered as “the more advanced production and relation of production” will always win “the underdeveloped production system and relation of production.”

For the evidences, it was found that the Yuan Dynasty’s annals which were written in the Ming Dynasty’s era were used as a reference by the researchers. Moreover, there were also other evidences or information from books and articles of neighboring countries and various ethnic groups which lived in the areas the event occurred which are Japan and Korean, such as, Japanese and Korean history books, and the Mongol and the Pai history books.
Discussions

It was found that there were only 10 publications regarding the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai, but there were 33 publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai. To sum up, the researchers in Chinese academic circle mainly focused on the period after Kublai Khan became the emperor more than the period before his enthronement. The main issues which were investigated in both before and after enthronement researches are politics and administration. There was only one research that is written about Kublai Khan's hobbies. Even though most of the publications were about politics and administration, the researcher noticed that the publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai had many details and the scope of the study was broader than the period before the enthronement. The publications regarding the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai mentioned only 2 issues which were the war between the Yuan Dynasty and the Kingdom of Dali and the usurpation. However, the publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai had 7 points in details about politics and administration, such as the war between the Yuan Dynasty and other kingdoms, policies in the reign of Kublai Khan, Kublai Khan’s administration concept, the relation between the Yuan Dynasty and other kingdoms, the relation between Kublai Khan and the important figures in the era, the change of capital in Kublai Khan’s era, and the treason in the country. It clearly showed all the little details and issues in the society during that time. The publications regarding the period after the enthronement of Emperor Kublai are very good tools to study about Emperor Kublai and social context in the Yuan Dynasty.

Recommendations

The researcher notice some issues have never been mentioned by Chinese official history textbooks, such as the legality of Emperor Kublai Khan ascend the throne, which was the keen issue for most Chinese scholars who study on the period before the enthronement of Emperor Kublai Khan. There may be a further study in this issue in the future.

This study is just the start of collecting various publications regarding Emperor Kublai which were published in China since 2000-2014. There should be further study
about the state of knowledge about Kublai Khan in ASEAN countries because Emperor Kublai had the relation with the region.

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