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Review on the policy of valuing agriculture and supporting measures the government took for agricultural production in the tang dynasty

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ABSTRACT

"Valuing agriculture" is a consistent policy in the feudal society in China, and the same also in Tang Dynasty, which even with a developed business and more relaxed restriction to the merchant compared to other feudal dynasties, however. "Value agriculture" policy is mainly characterized with "advise agriculture" and ensuring farming season in the tang dynasty. In order to secure the normal development of agriculture, the government of Tang Dynasty also takes measures vigorously, namely, promoting the development of agricultural technology, valuing and setting the calendar, compiling agricultural books and safeguarding the input of labor force, which play a positive role for the development of agricultural economy, and promote the development of agriculture, as a result, to provide the material guarantee for the prosperous Tang Dynasty.

KEYWORDS

The tang dynasty; "Valuing agricultural" policy; Agricultural production.



Agriculture, the foundation for the development of society, only when it develops stably, could the society move forward steadily. Since agricultural development is aimed at providing necessary agricultural products for the social development, the traditional society is to supply agricultural products, grain for instance, to meet the needs of the society. The condition of agricultural production not only directly influence on the performance of the governmental functions, but also the stability of political situation in society. For this, Marx pointed out: "agriculture will go through the decline and prosperity with government's rule, whose development highly depends on the quality of a government work"^[1].

“VALUING AGRICULTURE” POLICY THE TANG DYNASTY GOVERNMENT CARRIED ON

Policy of advised agriculture

All the Chinese governments in dynasties attach great importance to agricultural production, and actively undertake the role of "Advising farming and sericulture" which not only as one of the government's administrative responsibilities, but also a fundamental responsibility system. No matter the emperors, nobles or local beables, regarding "advised farming" as their main responsibilities, develop all kinds of positive measures to encourage people to devoted into the agricultural production, and supervise agricultural production, which greatly promote the development of the small-scale peasant economy. "Guanzi" has stated: "advising the people engaged in agriculture so as to rule them". Therefore it's obvious that the feudal monarchies pay much attention and strive to create a good atmosphere for the agricultural production. Be aware of the importance of agriculture, the Tang Dynasty governments inherit the policy of valuing agriculture without exception, and start to encourage the agricultural production throughout the country.

The ceremony of "plowing the field" was inherited and developed by Tang dynasty, Emperor Taizong advocates the importance of agriculture on a national scale to form a good atmosphere for valuing agriculture, and then inherits the ceremony "plowing by the emperor". In his view, as an important ceremony of agricultural development, "plowing by emperor" reflects that the country emphasis on the agricultural production. After that, Emperor Gaozong and Xuanzong of Tang has plowed by themselves, making examples for all the people, develop a trend of valuing agriculture in the nationwide.

"Advised farming" is the first task for the regime at all levels in the Tang Dynasty. Emperor Gaozu, the first thing he did was promulgated the edict "advised farmers" after defeating other warlords. Emperor Taizong puts forward: "reducing the burden of taxes and cost is to "advised farming", then people can enjoy plenty material and prosperity"^[2], and send his secretary to investigate the implementation of "advised farming". In addition, he also required the envoys that it's not allowed to welcome and see the envoys off to avoid neglecting agriculture, if not so, they're better not going. During the period of Kaiyuan, the emperor sent Yu Wenrong, an official of ministry of war and censor, to investigate the agricultural production, based on his opinion, Emperor Xuanzong set up "advised farmers judge" in particular, who were distributed in various places across the country, dedicated to persuade farming with great power. During the period of Emperor Suzong, the government set advising agriculture official and require that "each state has to set one Si Tian, responsible for farming; each county finds out two people without work as Tian Zheng to advise farming". Additionally, Emperor Daizong also dispatches Lijue and others to take on duties of "advised farming".

"Advised farming" as one of the contents to assess the performance of magistracy, is an important criteria to measure their working achievement. The administrative officials often adapt methods, checking and supervision as example, to encourage people to dedicate into agricultural production. Four evaluation criteria was carried out in the Tang Dynasty to assess the performance of the local governmental officials especially, namely, firstly, whether the population is increased; Secondly, the quantity of cultivated land; thirdly, the amount of taxes; and lastly, levy in advance. As "advised farming" is one of the major responsibilities for local officials, thus agricultural production was seen as the central task by local governments at all levels and enjoys a fast development for the reason that the honest and hard-working local officials pay great attention to implement the policy of "advised farming" and "guiding people to field", and actively construct the water conservancy facilities. Despite of the great changes of the political pattern happened in the late Tang Dynasty, the policy of "cultivation and advice farming" always put in a high position, especially was performed by the local officials to perform completely. Lu Ku, Tang Zhou secretariat in the period of Emperor Wuzong, realizes that "there's no big gap between hundreds of fields and no withered seedling in drought. Autumn embraces the good harvest after the weir finished. People in this the national most forget hunger" in his tenure. Zhang Quanyi, put emphasis on farming and open up wasteland when he trained soldiers as an administrator in Henan, making this place become an important place for tax in the Tang Dynasty. In the period of Emperor Zhaozong, Zhaotui, the loyal and force envoy in Chenzhou, attaches great importance to "advised farming" policy, and Han Jian, the state secretariat in Huazhou, also makes a great contribution to promote the development of agricultural production.

Policy of ensuring farming season

Agricultural production activities should be arranged relying on the four seasons, otherwise, no expected agricultural income could be achieved even when suffered great losses or a lot of labor and financial resources were invested, thus the Tang Dynasty governments pay special attention to this, and farmers were asked to have agricultural production at the right time, and issued imperial edicts to stop other affairs to ensure that farming season for many times. For example, Emperor Gaozu issued an edict that "for unusual construction, using the artisans, and stop it if it's not urgent"; Emperor Taizong also

repeatedly stressed that farming season must be assured and agricultural production absolutely can't be wasted of, he said that: "Farming season is the foundation for food and clothes, is that possible without interfering it?"^[3]. For his consideration that the crown ceremony of prince will influence the farming season if arranged in February, he orders a change in October regardless of the strong objection from many ministers, which fully embodies the idea that "don't occupying the farming season". During the period of Emperor Zhongzong, Lu Huaishen, the Shaoqing in the marble temple, presents a memorial to the emperor that do not waste the agricultural production because of building temples; until the period of Emperor Ruizong, Cui Fan as Yuan Wai Lang (an occupation in the Tang Dynasty), discusses the disadvantages of violating farming seasons when the emperor wants to rebuild Taoist temples, which was recorded in "Tang Compendium" means that if farming carried out without in accordance with the law of agricultural production, food production is bound to be affected, then bandits will surge to disturb the social order. Emperor Xuanzong, has issued the imperial edicts for many times to ask the local government to attach great importance to optimum time of agricultural production and encourage people to do agricultural production. In the period of Emperor Xuanzong, the emperor asks local officials to "strengthen advised farming and grow crops", and also dispatches sensors to inspect the agricultural production around the country. Emperor Daizong said in an edict that "agriculture is the foundation for politics, so as food for people. So all the things should make way for the people to carry out agricultural production during spring, loaning the seeds for the people who can't under take taxes and corvée", which is similar to the view of Emperor Xuanzong. During the Tang Dynasty, owing to the endeavor from the supreme ruler and nobles, to the ordinary people, the idea of "not taking farming season" was formed, and the agricultural policy of "three agriculture seasons are not being taken, then no dog will invade at the midnight" was seriously implemented, ordinary people were settled for agricultural production.

It is because the Tang Dynasty rulers pay attention to the "advised farming" policy and enact a series of "advised farming" system, coupled with the diligent magistrate to carry out earnestly, agricultural production enjoys a high-speed development and a beautiful thriving scene was once occurred in the society.

PROTECTION MEASURES THE TANG DYNASTY CARRIED ON AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Promotion of agricultural technology

The Tang Dynasty governments attach great importance to promote the advanced agricultural production technology, and formulate the relevant system to encourage people to contribute good seed when realizing the impact that the seed quality have on the agricultural production. For the advice of the Prime Minister Li Bi, Emperor Dezong abolishes the festival of the last day in January in the lunar calendar, and sets Zhonghe festival on the 1st in February in the lunar calendar, with the important content "asking all the officials to provide agricultural books, and Sinong (an occupation for agriculture), offers Si Nong the two kinds of seeds", while the seeds refer to the grain varieties with a longer growth period and mature lately, or with a shorter growth period, and mature early. The Tang Dynasty rulers formulate the relevant offering seeds system, showing the importance of seed, which is helpful to popularize and application of good seeds. During the Tang Dynasty, Dai Shulun, Fuzhou secretariat, who improves the irrigation technology, successfully solves the problem in the irrigation process for people, "people fight for irrigation, then making convenience for them by improving the irrigation technology". The Tang Dynasty develops the advanced agricultural production technology further and new tools to improve the agricultural labor productivity and output per unit area constantly, and the governments put emphasis on the promotion of agricultural production technology, and put forward guidance for people in their production activities, which increase the tax revenue on the one hand, and promote the development of agricultural production during the period of Tang Dynasty on the other hand.

SET CALENDAR

Tang dynasty rulers attach great importance to the calendar, and establish the specialized astronomical agency whose scale is second to none in the feudal society in ancient China. The staff composition and regulations in this agency changed frequently in three centuries, calendar, as an example, changed more than eight times. Compared with the former dynasties, calendar in the Tang Dynasty makes a big progress, which can be seen in the calendar changes. Generally speaking, for each dynasty, calendar mostly enacted by the central government, but costing a lot of time from calendar issue until spreading to the countryside, which doesn't adapt to the requirements of timely farming. As the constant development of block printing, the printing effectively solve the difficulties to promote calendar, which is beneficial to the government to fast promote calendar in a large scale, but also objectively lead to the pirate calendar appeared in the folk. According to the historical records: "the market of printing the pirate calendar is very popular in Sichuan and Huainan, the calendar has spread across to the country when the Astronomic Department haven't issue the new calendar each year"^[4], which shows that the phenomenon of pirate calendar was very serious. In order to eliminate it, the Tang governments make it clear in the edict that private calendar is forbidden, but failed at last, the main reason is that the government can't issue calendar in time, so farmers can't follow the farming timely, while the private calendar can avoid the problem effectively. In a word, the Tang Dynasty calendar makes a big progress in accuracy, which effectively meets the needs for the people to farming, and provides convenient conditions for agricultural production.

COMPILING AGRICULTURAL BOOKS

The Tang governments, attaching great importance and playing an increasingly important role in agricultural production, devote into compiling agricultural books to promote agricultural production by the printing and promotion. Even the rulers in dynasties put emphasis on agricultural production, but seldom participate in; in contrast, the rulers in Tang dynasty are personally involved in the compiling work of agricultural books. When Wu Zetian in charge of power, scholars Zhou Simao for example, were called together to write "Agriculture for Many People", which is the earliest agricultural book according to the record, with agricultural production technology as the center, summing up the production methods of cultivation in the long-term agricultural process, so people regard it as "agricultural book for each month". "Tang Compendium records about "repairment" and the content about "festivals" at the same time, such as "in February in sixth year in Zhenyuan, officials were given a banquet in the Zhongyuan festival in Qujiang pavilion... beginning with the officials rendering the queen mother three rolls of "Agriculture for Many People". Emperor Dezong chooses this day with the purpose to "spread the agricultural technology". This book, with great influences on agricultural production and compiled by government in the record, was very popular and read by many people. The Tang Dynasty dedicates into promoting agricultural books, spreading the agricultural science and technology through officials to the people, which makes the Tang dynasty attach great importance to agriculture production technology from top to bottom, and at that time, the local officials also vigorously promote agricultural production technology in their tenure. So we can say that the Tang Dynasty rulers pay much attention to agricultural production, and personally involved in the promotion of agricultural production techniques and activities, effectively to promote the popularity of agricultural science and technology all over the country, which is one of performances that the governments actively fulfill their own functions.

ENSURING AGRICULTURAL LABOR INPUT

Traditional agriculture is labor-intensive industry, refers to that the more work the people do, the more agricultural output, and the number of agricultural labor force is decisive to the efficiency of the production and scale of agriculture. Ye Shi once pointed out: "more people with more land reclamation and tax increases", "asking people to reclaim the land will increase the taxes, asking them as corvee and soldiers when they are settled", so it is conducive to the smooth progress of agricultural production though strengthening the management of agricultural labor force and improving the management level. But due to objective factors, there's more floating population in Tang dynasty, leading to the lack of agricultural labor force in the cradle of the floating population, and many people turn to other industries because agricultural production efficiency is relatively low, which greatly reduced the number of people engaged in agricultural production, limiting the development of agricultural production. In order to solve this problem, the Tang governments enact the policy of "equally distributed the land to people", adapting the compulsory measure to band farmers with land together, not only reduces the migration of the negative impact of agricultural production, but also increases the national tax income, and increasing the output of society. In addition, the government has promulgated the measures, such as calling the monks and nuns secularize, releasing the maid-in-waiting and arranging the refugees to return home, to control the number of non-agricultural population, so as to effectively reduce the number of floating population.

CONCLUSION

The Tang rulers and all the governments in previous dynasties attach great importance to the development of agriculture, and set all sorts of "value agriculture" policy, and for a smooth agricultural production, they make a lot of efforts, namely, promoting agricultural technology, valuing and setting calendar and compiling the agricultural books and safeguarding of the labor force in aspects such as security, so as to promote the development of agricultural economy in the Tang Dynasty.

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