

Data Analysis of the Types of War in Ancient China

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Abstract: Through data analysis of four different types of wars, four conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, during the period of division, there are more wars competing for agency power. Secondly, under the unified system, there were many peasant uprising wars. During the period of unification, the state had more power to protect the people. Fourthly, few countries can withstand two types of wars simultaneously.

Keywords: Type of war; Splitting; Great unification

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1. Overview of ancient Chinese wars

This article defines the types of wars and conducts data analysis, without discussing the specific process of wars. Therefore, the analysis is based on wars in the chronology. Through a reexamination of the wars recorded in the book, a total of 3753 wars occurred in 19 different historical periods from the 26th century BC to 1911 AD, as shown in **Table 1**.

In terms of the total number of wars, the Ming Dynasty had the most wars, with 574; Next is the Qing Dynasty, which recorded a total of 424 wars; The third largest historical period is the Spring and Autumn period, with a total of 382 recorded wars.

From the perspective of the average annual number of wars (note: the average annual number of wars only counted the frequency of wars from the Spring and Autumn Period to the Qing Dynasty), the Eastern Jin Dynasty had the highest frequency of wars, with an average of 2.64 times per year, followed by the Sui Dynasty with an average of 2.44 times per year, followed closely by the Yuan Dynasty with an average of 2.35 times per year, and the Ming Dynasty also had an average of 2.1 times per year. From the above analysis, it can be seen that the 272 years of the Eastern Jin Dynasty were the most turbulent period in Chinese history.

Table 1. Statistics of the number of wars in different periods in China

Historical stage		Number of wars		Historical stage		Number of wars	
1	Legendary Era — Five Emperors	5	11	The Northern and Southern Dynasties		153	
2	Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou	46	12	Sui Dynasty		88	
3	The Spring and Autumn Annals	382	13	The Tang dynasty		192	
4	Warring States	229	14	Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms		73	
5	Qin dynasty	9	15	Northern Song, Liao, Jin, and Western Xia		254	
6	The Western Han Dynasty	121	16	Southern Song, Jin, and Mongolian		293	
7	The Eastern Han Dynasty	277	17	Yuan dynasty		207	
8	three countries	71	18	The Ming dynasty		574	
9	The Western Jin Dynasty	83	19	Qing dynasty		424	
10	The Eastern Jin Dynasty	272		Total		3753	

Note: Source: Chronology of Chinese Wars in Various Dynasties by the Compilation Group of “Chinese Military History”^[1]

2. Definition of war types

Under the general state system, it can be divided into three groups: the ruling class, the ruled class, and the foreign aggressors. Using the discourse of agency theory, it is expressed that the ruled class is the principal, the ruling class is the agent, and the foreign aggressors are a third-party force. Yoram Bazel has a detailed discussion on this topic^[2]. This article improves the principal-agent relationship: the public is the principal, the central government is the direct agent responsible to the principal, and local governments are indirect agents responsible to the central government. Therefore, in the entire social relationship, there are four groups: principals, direct agents, indirect agents, and external enemies^[3].

According to the above conditions, wars in Chinese history can be divided into four categories: First, wars between the agricultural civilization of the Central Plains and the nomadic tribes or other foreign tribes in the north. These wars have the nature of defending the country and are direct agents providing safe services to the principal. This type of war is usually recorded in the chronology with the names of foreign enemies, such as the Xiongnu, Western tribes, Turks, etc.

The second is the war fought by different military forces for direct agency rights. In the Chu Han War between Xiang Yu and Liu Bang, during the Three Kingdoms period, Wei, Shu, and Wu attacked each other to compete for the highest ruling power, that is, direct agency power^[4].

The third is the extreme measures taken by the principal to replace the direct agent through violent means. From the perspective of the principal-agent theory, these wars have the nature of the principal supervising the agent.

The fourth is other types of wars, mainly including wars between direct agents and indirect agents, and wars fought by agents to maintain order^[5].

3. War data analysis

During the legendary era from the 26th century BC to the 22nd century BC, there were a total of 5 recorded

wars, which, according to the classification criteria in this article, were all wars over proxy rights. In the battles of Huangdi and Chiyao, both sides aimed to defeat each other and gain control of their territories, becoming agents of the local people ^[6-7].

During the Xia, Shang, and Western Zhou dynasties from 2070 BC to 771 BC, there were a total of 46 wars, including 15 wars against foreign enemies, 30 wars over proxy rights, and 1 peasant uprising. This indicates that the wars during this period mainly came from the ruling class's struggle for agency rights.

During the Spring and Autumn Period (769–476 BC), there were a total of 382 wars, including 43 against foreign enemies, 335 battles for proxy rights, and 4 other wars. There were no peasant uprisings. During the Warring States period (475–221 BC), there were a total of 229 wars, including 1 resistance against foreign enemies, 226 struggles for agency rights, and 2 peasant uprisings ^[8].

The Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period were the periods before the formation of a unified Chinese history. During this period, different military forces sought to seize more land and population, becoming agents of more people. This kind of competition can be achieved by providing better services and attracting more people to join, but the means of competition continue to deteriorate and transform into war. Therefore, the wars during this period were mostly wars over proxy rights. This phenomenon of competing for agency rights was not improved until Emperor Qin Shi Huang unified China. However, under the unified system, another type of war emerged ^[9-10].

The Qin Dynasty (220–207 BC), which unified China, lasted for 13 years and had a total of 9 wars, including 4 wars against foreign enemies and 5 wars of peasant uprisings. During the Western Han Dynasty (206–24 AD), there were a total of 121 wars, 63 battles against foreign enemies, 22 battles for agency rights, 32 peasant uprisings, and 4 other types of wars. During the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 AD) in 195 AD, there were a total of 277 wars resisting foreign enemies 120 times, competing for agency rights 70 times, staging 40 peasant uprisings, and engaging in 47 other types of warfare.

In the short 13 years of the Qin Dynasty, there were 5 peasant uprisings, while in the Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period of 549, there were only 2 uprisings. The transformation of this type of war also reveals a shift in the system. The most common type of war during the Han Dynasty was the invasion of foreign enemies, indicating that the raids of northern nomadic tribes became a major threat to society at that time. The number of proxy wars in the Eastern Han Dynasty was 70, which was three times more than the 22 wars in the Western Han Dynasty, indicating that the rule of the Eastern Han Dynasty was not as stable as that of the Western Han Dynasty ^[11-12].

During the Three Kingdoms period (220–265 AD), there were a total of 71 wars, including 7 wars against foreign enemies, 48 wars for proxy rights, 11 peasant uprisings, and 5 other wars. During the Western Jin Dynasty (265–316 AD), there were a total of 83 wars, including 23 wars against foreign enemies, 23 wars for proxy rights, 14 peasant uprisings, and 23 other wars. During the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420 AD), there were 272 uprisings, 41 defenses against foreign enemies, 184 struggles for agency rights, 26 peasant uprisings, and 21 other uprisings. During the Southern and Northern Dynasties (421–580 AD), there were a total of 153 uprisings, including 25 against foreign enemies, 102 struggles for agency rights, 23 peasant uprisings, and 3 other uprisings. The Three Kingdoms, Two Jin, Southern and Northern Dynasties lasted for 350 years, marking the second period of division in China after the first unification. This state of national division has led to various forces eager to obtain more agency rights and constantly fighting and suppressing them ^[13].

During the Sui Dynasty (581–617 AD), there were a total of 88 wars, including 3 against foreign enemies,

7 disputes for agency rights, 58 peasant uprisings, and 10 other wars. During the Tang Dynasty (618–906 AD), there were a total of 192 wars, including 124 wars against foreign enemies, 14 wars over proxy rights, 17 peasant uprisings, and 37 other wars. The Sui and Tang dynasties were the second period of great unification in China. Against the backdrop of great unification, wars for proxy rights significantly decreased, and foreign invasion became the most important threat. The phenomenon of peasant uprisings, where principals expressed dissatisfaction to proxies, ranked second^[14–15].

During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–959 AD), there were a total of 73 wars, including 6 battles against foreign enemies, 37 battles for agency rights, 3 peasant uprisings, and 27 other wars. This is the second period of transition from unification to division. In just 52 years, there have been 37 proxy power struggles and 27 other types of wars, which are internal wars within the ruling class.

During the Northern Song, Liao, Jin, and Western Xia dynasties (960–1127 AD), there were a total of 254 wars, including 127 battles against foreign enemies, 24 battles for agency rights, 20 peasant uprisings, and 83 other wars. During the Southern Song, Jin, and Mongol dynasties (1128–1279 AD), there were a total of 293 wars, including 180 wars against foreign enemies, 29 wars over agency rights, 50 peasant uprisings, and 34 other wars^[16–17].

During the Yuan Dynasty (1280–1368 AD), there were a total of 207 wars, including 19 wars against foreign enemies, 36 wars over proxy rights, 138 peasant uprisings, and 14 other wars. The Yuan Dynasty was the first unified dynasty ruled by ethnic minorities, which greatly reduced the risk of foreign invasion. However, it issued multiple policies that went against public opinion, and the society's principals were extremely dissatisfied with the agents, leading to a large number of ruled people expressing their dissatisfaction in the form of war and demanding changes to the agency agreement^[18].

During the 275-year period of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1643 AD), there were a total of 574 wars, including 302 wars against foreign enemies, 7 wars over agency rights, 236 peasant uprisings, and 29 other wars. During the Ming Dynasty, foreign enemies became the biggest threat, and peasant uprisings also became an important threat to the country. Two types of wars put the Ming Dynasty in crisis. From the perspective of development trend, the Ming Dynasty had wars to resist foreign invasion from its establishment to its downfall, while peasant uprisings mostly existed in the second half of the period. It is worth noting that during the entire Ming Dynasty, there were only 7 wars for proxy rights, indicating that the central rule of the Ming Dynasty was relatively stable^[19–20].

During the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911 AD), there were a total of 424 wars, including 55 battles against foreign enemies, 45 battles for agency rights, 250 peasant uprisings, and 74 other wars. The Qing Dynasty was a dynasty that integrated agricultural civilization and nomadic civilization well, ranking third in the number of foreign invasions, mostly by later Western powers.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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