

# A Study on the Division of Labor in Shiji\*

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## 1. Huozhi Liezhuan—Its Composition

Si Ma Qian is believed to have compiled his famous work Shiji between BC 108 and 84. He took up this work, it is said, to fulfill the last wishes of his father Si Ma Tan. He was officially appointed the head of the History Bureau.

Si Ma Qian says that he was born in Longmen in Shanxi, and worked both as a farm hand and a shepherd in his childhood. He mastered the classics at the age of ten, and by twenty he was one of the most widely traveled men of his period. His travels took him to Changjiang and Huaishui in the south where he visited Guijishan, Yuanshui and Xiangshui. His northern travels took him to Wenshui and Sishui, where he studied in the academic centers of Qi and Lu, inquired into the legacies of Confucius, and attended archery ceremony, before returning home via Pengcheng, Liang and Chu.<sup>1)</sup> He became a

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\* The present paper is the first section of chapter 1 of an article entitled Chugoku Keizai Shisoshiron (A study on the History of Economic Thoughts of China) by the same author which was first published 1976 in Japanese by Minerva Press, and second published 1991 in Chinese by Peijing University Press.

government official later with the rank *langzhong*, and took part in the campaigns against Ba and Shu. He was also with the forces that attacked Qiong, Ze and Kunming. It is needless to say that these travels broadened his outlook vastly. He got the news of his father's grave illness during one of such official assignments. After his return to the capital he took up the work of editing history to fulfill his father's last wishes. In BC 99, he was castrated for advocating the cause of LiLing. His anger over this insult found an outlet in the compilation of *Shiji* to which he devoted himself feverishly.

Huozhi Liezhuan constitutes a chapter in *Shiji*, and understanding it poses certain problems since it is a single continuous passage of about five thousand characters without any subdivisions and paragraphs. Seen in the light of history of economic thought, this work can be divided broadly into eight sections, the first three dealing with the

Table 1-1: Basic set-up of Huozhi Liezhuan

Division		Sections and their topics
First half	Spring-Autumn   Qin Period	a) Material wants of human beings, the basic data in economic discussion b) Social division of labor, a byproduct of regional environmental variations c) Agriculture, industry, trade and gathering: the sources of wealth of the nation and the family, actual examples
Latter half	Han Period	d) Economic prosperity in each region with early Han liberalization policy e) Rise of cities as centers of administration and commodity circulation f) New industries and professions, their development g) Accumulation of wealth, average profit rate, income formation h) Examples of property accumulation, and conclusion

period up to the fall of Qin, and the last five with the Former Han period up to the early period of Emperor Wu, Di's reign. A brief study of these sections will be made in this paper. Table 1-1 shows the eight sections and the topics dealt with in each section.

**a) Wants, the basis of economic life**

In the beginning of *Huozhi Liezhuan*, Si Ma Qian quotes a line from Lao Zi's work *Xiaoguo Guaminlun* and dismisses it as utterly impractical since it calls for suppression of man's economic desires.<sup>2)</sup> He starts by accepting the instinctive desires of human beings. He frankly accepts the desires common to ordinary human beings, and take these as the basic factors in discussing economy of a real society formed by an aggregate of ordinary human beings. This is more or less the same as presuming *homo economics* as the basis in modern economic theories. He did not accept the Confucianist or Taoist hypothesis which called for 'reducing or curbing desire' after presuming a hypothetical ethical or ideal human being.<sup>3)</sup> Herein we can find the most realistic aspect of his ideas. This is how he puts it:

I do not know what was there before Shennong. The Book of Songs and the Book of Books say that after Yu and Xia, ears wanted to hear beautiful sounds and eyes wanted to see beautiful colors. Mouth was engrossed with the taste of meat, body sought only pleasure, and mind took pride in authority. People have been submerged in desire for a long time. Even if attempts are made to make them see reason, it will perhaps not succeed. Hence the good politicians accept these facts. The politicians with lesser ability try to guide these under the guile of profit, the politicians

of even lesser ability try to enlighten them, those even worse try to keep these control, and the worst ones try to fight these.

In short, economic aspiration is a natural human instinct. This instinct motivates a man to improve his living standard, and encourages him to carry on brisk economic activities. The wisest economic policy is to allow people a free hand to carry on economic activities, and not to impose any restraint or control out of political or authoritarian considerations.

#### **b) Appearance of social division of labor**

Si Ma Qian explains the appearance of social division of labor in the following way on the basis of the experiences he gained during his extensive travels.

Shanxi is rich in timber, bamboo, paper tree, flax, yak tail, jade and precious stones, Shandong in fish, salt, lacquer, silk and entertainers, Jiangnan in furniture timber, ginger, cinnamon, gold, tin, lead, vermilion, rhinoceros, tortoise-shell, pearl, ivory and fur, and the region north of Longmen and Jieshi in horses, cattle, sheep, carpet, fur, sinews and horn. In the hills, there are deposits of copper and iron over wide areas. These are only some of the products. People of China are very fond of these things. People use these for food and clothings. People sustain their life with these and offer these to the dead. People produce food by agriculture. People also collect the products of hills, forests, rivers and lakes, make goods out of these, and exchange these goods by trade. Why is it necessary to govern and educate people, levy

taxes and makes periodic reports. People get what they want according to their ability and hard work. Hence, fall of price is a signal for price rise, and rise in price is a signal for price crash. That all are engaged in their professions and enjoy their work is just like water rushing for lower areas. They work non-stop both day and night, come on their own uninvited, and take their products for exchange voluntarily. This conformance with what is reasonable is the feature that remains in accord with nature.

There are considerable mutual variations in the physical and climatic conditions of the four regions mentioned above. There are historical differences also. These differences have resulted in regional differences in agriculture, industry and commerce, and gathering. The consumer goods produced in all these regions are all much sought after by the Chinese people, who are the consumers. This has naturally lead to social division of labor.<sup>4)</sup> Specialization of production improves human ability and adaptability. Efficiency also goes up.<sup>5)</sup> The things produced are exchanged in the markets. The market prices are governed by demand and supply. Production of goods are carried out with these prices as the guiding factor.<sup>6)</sup> Such market system is not determined by directives or orders from the above. It is determined by the natural forces of free economy and market economy.

**c) Agriculture, industry, commerce and gathering—source of the wealth of nation**

As discussed above, in such economic set-up, the farmers, artisans, merchants and gatherers are the producers of food and clothings, and as such they constitute the driving force in producing the

wealth of the nation and the family. The ideas of Si Ma Qian are indeed similar to those discussed by Adam Smith in his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.<sup>7)</sup> If we consider the activities of the ruling class, the military class and the government officialdom as non-productive, then the productive activities of the farmers, artisans, merchants, and the gatherers constitute the sources of wealth of the nation, or in short, the wealth of people. Si Ma Qian's theory of 'wealth of nation' can be corroborated by a number of actual examples. The examples of Qi and Yue can be cited in this connection. Si Ma Qian gives an interesting account of the 'wealthy nation and strong army' policy followed by Tai Gong Wang and Guan Zhong of Qi and Fan Li and Ji Ran of Yue. He narrates the stories of Fan Li, who took up the name Tao Zhu Gong to hide his identity, Zi Gong, Bai Gui, Yi Dun, Guo Zong, Wu Shi Luo and Gua Fu Qing as examples of 'wealthy family' that constituted individual family unit.

#### **d) Liberalization policy in the early Han period**

After unifying the country once again following the fall of Qin, the Han administration followed a policy of economic liberalization by abolishing all the restrictions and controls of the Qin period. They pursued a vigorous economic policy by throwing open the check posts and relaxing restrictions on making salt, iron, and exploiting the hills, forests and fisheries. The result was an unprecedented spurt in economic activities where 'rich merchants carried out trading activities all over the country to deliver goods wherever needed'. Lauding the boom that continued for more than seventy years following the establishment of the Han dynasty, Si Ma Qian says in the *Pingzhunshu* chapter of *Shiji* as follows:

Government established peace. There were no floods or droughts. People had what they wanted and all were satisfied. The godowns in the feudal lords' fiefs were full, the provincial treasuries had surplus, the central treasury swelled enormously. Money was so abundant that the string tying money rotted.

Huozhi Liezhuan covers up to middle of Emperor Wu Di's reign when this economic boom came to an end. Si Ma Qian has devoted a separate chapter Pingzhunshu in Shiji for describing the disastrous consequences of Wu Di's economic policies. The economic conditions of the society and the developments in individual economic sectors are indeed the most befitting topics for Huozhi Liezhuan.

The liberalization policy of the early Han years stimulated brisk economic activities all over China. He has analyzed the characteristic features of economic developments in Guanzhong, Sanhe, Qi, Liang, Song, Xichu, Dongchu, Yue, Nanchu and other regions from the perspectives of economic geography and history. His assessment of two regions are quoted below.

Chu and Yue (Jiangnan) comprise a vast area with sparse population. Rice is eaten here and fish is made into soup. Straw is burnt to enrich soil, and weeding is done by letting in water. There is no need to buy fruits, berries, fish or shellfish, etc. Soil is good, food is in abundance, and there is no famine. Because of this people are lazy and pass time without doing anything. There are many poor people since they do not make any saving. Nobody suffers from cold and hunger in Jianghuai and areas further

south. There are no very rich either.

Yi-sishui and other areas of northern China are good for crops, mulberry, flax and domestic animals. But the area is small with dense population. There are frequent floods and droughts, and people are fond of saving. Hence, Qin, Xia, Liang and Lu encourage agriculture and treat people kindly. The same is with Sanhe, Wan and Chen. In addition, trading also flourishes here. People of Qi and Zhao are intelligent and skillful, and take advantage of opportunities. Agriculture, animal husbandry and sericulture flourish in Yan and Dai.

#### **e) Rise of cities**

Si Ma Qian also identified the rise of cities as a unique economic feature of the early Han period. Not only the Han capital Changan and the other old political centers like Hedong, Henei and Henan, etc. established during the Spring-Autumn Period and Warring States period prospered, new urban centers like Yang, Pingyang, Chong, Dai, Wen, Zhi, Zhongshan, Handan, Zheng, Wei, Yewang, Yan, Luoyang, Linzi, Chulu, Tao, Suiyang, Jiangling, Chen, Wu, Shouchun, Hefei, Yuzhang, Changsha, Panyu, Yingchuan, Nanyang, Wan and others sprang up all over the country. These served as the nerve centers for commodity circulation network. The cities usually had small areas with large concentration of people, who carried out many non-agricultural activities. The cities provided opportunities for various non-agricultural and non-trading activities.

#### **f) Development of new professions**

It is needless to say that human beings instinctively want to get

rich quick without going through the tedious process of learning. It is with wealth in view that the wise men sought official appointments, argued with government and died in defense of faith, or a recluse scholars did famous things.

The scholars were, in a sense, salaried employees who, worked for earning a living. The professional soldiers, the boys of towns and villages, ladies of entertainment profession and gay quarters, idle nobles, doctors and fortune tellers, people with technical skill and government officials, all had a common desire, that of acquiring wealth. The farmers, artisans and merchants accumulated wealth, and tried hard to increase it. Because the cities functioned as the centers of administration and commodity circulation, people concentrated here in large numbers, giving rise to fierce competition. Naturally an atmosphere was produced for creation of new professions and industries unknown earlier. Seen from the conventional values of the farmers, artisans and merchants, some of these might appear to be evil, unethical licentious activities, profiteering, speculation, and lewd coquettish entertainment. Women became a working force in the society. Si Ma Qian says that women played music, put on shoes, tried to become friendly with the rich, and became employees in the palaces and harems of the rulers. The cities became a new type of market place, and new professions and industries unknown earlier appeared here. This happened because demands for such things appeared in the society. The mean profit margin was much higher in these new fields. This excess profitability served as the stimulus for such new professions. What is interesting here is that many of the jobs created by these new industries were what we say tertiary sector jobs nowadays. These were the jobs related to medical and catering services,

transportation, finance, gambling and leisure, domestic help and the like, which were non-existent in the conventional peasant, artisan, merchant and gatherer social set-up. It is remarkable that Si Ma Qian could understand the changes brought about in the society by the policy of liberalization of the early Han period.

### g) Property and income

In his work, Si Ma Qian has uses a word *sohoka*, a term denoting the propertied class of the pre-Han period. To put in precise term, if a person has property worth one million Qian, then he will have annual property income of two hundred thousand Qian, assuming that it will earn 20% return annually. This income is equal to tax levied by a lord ruling over one thousand households at the rate of two hundred Qian annually per household. Hence Si Ma Qian says that *sohoka* is a person who can earn such income from sources other than government service or fiefs. He also gives a list of wealth equivalent to this minimum level, i. e., one million Qian, that a *sohoka* should possess. The list is shown in Table 1-2. The list contains sixteen items, and if a person possesses the standard quantity of any one item, then he will have an annual income of two hundred thousand Qian like a *sohoka*. He has calculated the standard amounts on the basis of two hundred thousand Qian as the annual return. These properties are the sources that produce wealth, and one earns this income just by sitting at home, without going round peddling door to door or going somewhere else. The income therefrom equals the 'tax from a thousand households'. In short, it showed the target for accumulation of wealth. One had to wait for years for his income to build up such property. Si Ma Qian says that a poor man in seeking wealth must know that agricul-

Table 1-2: Standard property criterion of *sohoka*

Production area	Product	Standard quantity
1. Pasture	Horse	50 heads
2. Pasture	Cattle	167 heads
3. Pasture	Sheep	250 heads
4. Marshes	Pig	250 heads
5. Water	Fish pond	1,000 dan
6. Hill	Timber	1,000 trees
7. Anyi	Chinese date	1,000 trees
8. Yan, Qin	Chestnut	1,000 trees
9. Shuhan, Jiangling	Oranges	1,000 trees
10. Huaibei, Changshan and Heqi areas	Catalpa	1,000 trees
11. Chen, Xia	Lacquer	1,000 mu
12. Qi, Lu	Mulberry, flax	1,000 mu
13. Weichuan	Bamboo	1,000 mu
14. City suburbs	Fertile land	1,000 mu
15. City suburbs	Medicinal and dye herbs	1,000 mu
16. City suburbs	Ginger, leek	1,000 qi

ture is no match for manufacture, and manufacture is no match for trade. By this he probably tried to suggest that there is difference in profitability between agriculture, industry and trade, and that to start a venture, trade needs lesser capital than industry, which in turn needs lesser capital than agriculture.

Next, Si Ma Qian takes up the typical industries of the commodity circulation centers and big cities and writes about the volume of transaction that an individual industry should carry out annually for having the annual income of two hundred thousand Qian. He gives concrete figures for each item, like 1,000 jars of wine, killing 1,000 cattle, sheep and pig, selling 1,000 bags of grains, 1,000 cart loads of

firewood and straw, 1,000 bamboos poles, 100 light horse carriages, 1,000 jin by weight of bronze vessel, 100 child slaves, 1,000 dou by volume of lacquer, 1,000 jin by weight of globefish and scabbard fish, and 1,000 furs of fox and mink. He ends the list with 'interest on one thousand Guan loan'. This suggests that one could get the interest of two hundred thousand Qian annually by lending one thousand Guan. Incidentally, one Guan is equal to one thousand Qian. Si Ma Qian's social division of labor covers all types of manufacturing, commodity circulation and financial industries. In short, he probably wants to say that even if one did not possess wealth to the extent stated in Table 1-2, he could start some trading or manufacturing enterprise in a big city, slowly enlarge the scope of his business and become a member of the *sohoka* class by raising his annual income to two hundred Qian level.

Even though the way of acquiring wealth may vary, anybody who accumulates the standard wealth automatically becomes a *sohoka*, irrespective of his birth. A wealthy person earns the respect of society, and can deal with the nobles on equal terms. To Si Ma Qian income is income whether it is earned through labor or not. He sums up his views in the line. 'That there are rich and poor in the world is not because somebody snatches something, or somebody's things are snatched. People who are good at making money leaves behind wealth, and those who are bad at making money become poor.'

#### h) The *kashokuka* of the Han period

Si Ma Qian gives an account of the *kashokuka* of the early Han period in the last section of Huozhi Liezhuan. He writes: 'I am going to write here about the ways by which the wise men of our times have

acquired wealth, and leave for the posterity as examples.' Zhuo clan and Cheng Zheng of Shu and Kong clan of Wan became prisoners in the lawless period at the end of the Warring States period, but even then they utilized their knowledge of economic geography, opened up iron mines and set up iron foundry, and accumulated a fortune. Bing clan of Cao also set up iron foundry and accumulated fortune through thrift, lending and rental business and trade. Diao Jian of Qi treated his cunning slaves very kindly, engaged them in salt and fish business. The slaves were allowed to develop their business talent and accumulate wealth, while Diao Jian himself gained enormously in the process. Shishi of Zhou also accumulated wealth amounting to seventy million by carrying on business for a long time and thrift. Ren clan of Xuanqu hoarded grains during the disorder that broke out towards the end of the Qin period, and made a fortune when grain prices rose. When the Han forces defeated the Huns and captured their territory, Jiao Yao immediately moved in and made a fortune by stock breeding. When the seven states warfare involving Wu, Chu and others broke out and the outcome hang in a balance, Wu Yan advanced funds on interest to the Dukes of Changan for military operations and made a fortune. Accumulating enormous wealth, the Tian clans of Guanzhong acted like the modern-day zaibatsu. These *kashokuka* pushed forward the tradition set during the Qin and earlier periods, and Si Ma Qian writes about it as follows: 'Their actions were logical, fitted in well with the changes of the times, and reaped benefits out of it. They made fortune by doing petty things and maintained the wealth by investing in agriculture. Sometimes they took recourse to rough and tough methods, but by and large they adopted mild means to protect their property. It is worth mentioning these developments since they

are the quite logical outcomes.' In all the ages, there two basic rules for making money, viz., diligence and thrift. The main weapon of the wealthy of the Han period was the new ideas. The *kashokuka* of the Han period did not tie themselves down to the conventional social values and practices. They persistently explored new areas of economic activities. Some of the new areas of their activities are given in Table 1-3 below.

Table 1-3: Some new areas of activity of Han *kashokuka*

Area	Social value	<i>kashokuka</i>	Accomplishment
1. Agriculture	Interior job	Qin Yang	Leading figure of province
2. Grave theft	Unethical job	Qu Shu	Prospered
3. Gambling	Bad job	Huan Fa	Acquired wealth
4. Peddling	Not fit for gentleman	Yong Re Cheng	Acquired wealth
5. Selling oil	Shameful job	Yong Bo	Acquired huge amount of money
6. Selling syrup	Petty job	Zhang clan	Acquired huge amount of money
7. Sharpening sword	Low level technology	Zhi clan	Ate like nobles
8. Dry sheep meat	Light and simple	Zhuo clan	Had cavalry as bodyguards
9. Horse doctor	Lowly	Zhang Li	Called slaves by ringing bell

## 2. Industries, division of labor, accumulation of wealth

As discussed above, Huozhi Liezhuan can be divided into eight sections, each section dealing with a specific topic. A comparative study of the economic activities in the pre-Han and the early Han periods will be carried out below.

Si Ma Qian basically assumes that any discussion on economy should properly take the physical desires of human beings into

account. With this as his axiom, he says in the first part that social division of labor is inevitable because of the regional variations in nature and environment. The activities of the farmers, artisans, merchants and gatherers are the 'sources of a nation's wealth', because these activities bring prosperity to the nation and its people.

In the second part, he discusses the economic boom that followed the liberalization policy of the early Han period, and urban transformation of the centers of administration and commodity circulation across the country. Industries and jobs of new types appeared in these urban centers, and a large number of *kashokuka* came into existence. The wealth of the *kashokuka* far exceeded the standard level, and because of their wealth, they enjoyed a luxurious living similar to that of the feudal lords. Si Ma Qian argues in favor of a person of even lowly birth joining the ranks of *kashokuka* provided he could accumulate a certain amount of wealth or achieve a certain volume of sale. This could be done through trade and manufacturing activities, especially the professions of new types, some of which were considered to be lowly or not very ethical in the earlier periods. It has already been pointed out that many of these new professions are what we say the jobs of tertiary sector now-a-days.

Division of labor into four groups, viz., farmers, artisans, merchants and gatherers was quite appropriate during the Qin and earlier periods. In the Han period, however, new professions, which could not be fitted into any of these four groups, started appearing one after another. Some of these professions even attained social acceptance equal to these earlier four. Although Si Ma Qian does not use the term 'industrial structure', it is highly probable that he was conscious of this new development. He probably saw the transition

from the pre-Han 'farmer, artisan, merchant and gatherer' type division of labor to a new type of division of labor brought about by the new 'industrial structure' of the Han period as a positive development in the society and economy of the period. The *kashokuka* or the *sohoka*<sup>8)</sup> took the center stage in this new development.

#### Reference notes

- 1) Shiji-§130 Taishigong-zixu
- 2) Daodejing §80 Xiaoguo-guamin-Lun
- 3) Confucian Analects Book IV. Liren, The works of Mencius Book 1. King Hui of Liang, Daodejing §1. 19, 33
- 4) It's very interesting to compare Si Ma Qian's Economic thoughts with that of Adam Smith.  
This division of labour, from which so many advantages are derived, is not originally the effect of any human wisdom, which foresees and intends that general opulence to which it gives occasion. It is the necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human nature which has in view no such extensive utility; the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another. (An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, BK. I, Ch. II)
- 5) And thus the certainty of being able to exchange all that surplus part of the produce of his own labour, which is over and above his own consumption, for such parts of the produce of other men's labour as may have occasion for, encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess for that particular species of business. The difference of natural talents in different man is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown up to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause, as the effect of the division of labour. (Ibid.)
- 6) The natural price, therefore, is, as it were, the central price, to which the prices of all commodities are continually gravitating. Different accidents may sometimes keep them suspended a good deal above it, and sometimes force them down even somewhat below it. But whatever may be the obstacles which hinder them from settling in this centre of repose and continuance, they are constantly tending towards it. (Ibid., BK. I, Ch. VII)
- 7) The annual labour of every nation is the fund which originally supplies

it with all the necessaries and conveniencies of life which consist always either in the immediate produce of that labour, or in what is purchased with that produce from other nations. According, therefore, as this produce, or what is purchased with it, bears a greater or smaller proportion to the number of those who are to consume it, the nation will be better or worse supplied with all the necessaries and conveniencies for which it has occasion. (Ibid., Introduction and plan of the work)

8) *sohoka*, *kashokuka*: Both these terms are applied loosely to the propertied class of the period having wealth worth one million Qian or more. The former implies the lack of feudal authority aspect, and the latter the wealth aspect of the class.

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『史記』に見られる分業論について  
『中国経済思想史論』 1976 著者 桑田 幸三  
英語訳 S. K. チャウドリ

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今から2100年も昔、司馬遷が編集した『史記』が世界的な歴史古典の一つであることは、言うまでもあるまい。全巻130巻のうち第129巻の『貨殖列伝』は経済篇とでも称すべき特色ある専篇である。多数の貨殖家（企業家）が登場するが、その間に司馬遷の経済思想が縦横に織り込まれている。

『貨殖列伝』の内容を大まかに区切ってみると、全体を前後二段に区分しうる。前段は春秋・戦国から秦代に至る時期（BC 8 C ~ BC 3 C）、後段は漢代初期（BC 200 ~ BC 100ころ）の経済問題について述べられている。

前段は、さらに次の3節に分けられる。

- (a) 人間の物質的欲望を与件として経済問題を論ずべきこと。
- (b) 中国各地域の自然環境の相違に基づく社会的分業の形成。
- (c) 農・工・商および虞（林業・水産業・鉱業）は富国富民の源泉であること。

その具体例。

後段は次の5節に区切ることが出来る。

- (d) 漢初の自由化政策による各地域経済の発展。
- (e) 政治や地域流通の中心にみる都会の勃興。
- (f) 新興職業・新興産業の成立・発展。
- (g) 財産の蓄積，平均利潤率，所得の形成。
- (h) 貨殖の事例と総括。

本論は司馬遷の分業論を中心に、その経済思想の一端を現代経済学の観点から考察したものである。

尚、本書は1991年に北京大学出版社から中国語訳が同名で出版された。