

## Original Paper

# Royal Supremacy and Its Influence on the Formation of Early British Nation-State

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### **Abstract**

*Tudor Dynasty is in the transitional period of modern Europe. On the one hand, it is characterized by the struggle of religious power and kingship. On the other hand, it is featured by the formation and development of the early nation-state. This paper briefly discusses the "royal supremacy" of Tudor Dynasty in England and the development of the early nation-state in British and the concrete manifestation of "royal supremacy" and expounds the influence of it on the formation of British nation-state from the following five aspects: economy, political institutions, law, local administration and national consciousness. By analyzing the definition of "royal supremacy" and its influence on the formation of the British nation-state, it is helpful to grasp the development process of modern countries and the particularity of the formation of different nation-states, so as to better grasp the law of British historical development. In a word, "royal supremacy", as the result of the religious reform, greatly promotes the formation and development of the British nation-state in the early modern times in the specific historical period.*

### **Keywords**

*royal supremacy, nation- state, religious reform, Tudor dynasty*

### **1. Introduction**

Tudor Dynasty has an important historical position in the development of modern British nation-state. This period is in the transitional period of modern Europe. On the one hand, it shows the struggle between religious power and kingship. On the other hand, it shows the formation and development of the early nation-state. The formation of "royal supremacy" is an important political expression and driving force for the formation of nation-state in early modern England.

### 1.1 Studies Abroad

On the studies of "royal supremacy", foreign scholars mainly write the general history of Britain or historical facts in stages, and "royal supremacy" is displayed through the author's historical statements and historical data analysis. For example, Elton's *England under the Tudors* and Dickens's *The English Reformation*.

Regarding the studies on the formation and development of the early British nation-state, there are several views: firstly, Edwin Jones's *The English Nation: the Great Myth* emphasized the influence of religious reform on the formation of the British nation-state. Secondly, Smith, in his work *The Emergence of A Nation State: The Commonwealth of England* expounds the importance of political struggle for the establishment of the country. Finally, Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer's research *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Culture Revolution* focused on the national control mechanism-cultural factors, emphasizing the important role of culture in the process of national formation.

### 1.2 Studies at Home

Domestic scholars' researches on the "royal supremacy" can be divided into the following two categories: Firstly, some of them describe the religious struggle of Tudor dynasty or show "royal supremacy" in political system reform. For example, Liu Xincheng's *Questioning the Theory of Tudor Monarchy*, Cheng Handa and Yu Min's *Between Autocracy and Rule of Law-An Analysis of Tudor Paradox*, are more concerned with Tudor regime—the discussion of autocratic monarchy. Another type of research permeates the research into more specific aspects, such as law, parliament, theory and so on. Specific research results are as follows: Firstly, taking Bian Yao's *The Establishment of the Sovereignty of Tudor Dynasty in England* as an example, starting from the relationship between kingship and law, this paper analyzes the legal basis of "royal supremacy" in Henry VIII period, so as to further explain the historical connotation and significance of "royal supremacy". In addition to the important factor of law, other scholars have studied the theoretical problem. For example, Wei Heming and Chen Hua wrote the article *The Theoretical Study of "royal supremacy" during Henry VIII*.

On the formation and development of the early British nation-state, Yue Rong's article *Research Review on the Formation of the British Nation-state* is more comprehensive in China. His article *Political Motives for the Formation of the British Nation-State-An Analysis of Power Elements in the Middle Ages* puts forward that "the conflict and struggle from two power systems laid the foundation for the formation of the British nation-state—first is the state principle that dispelled the feudal principle and the second one is the conflict and struggle between secular power represented by kingship and church power" (Yue, 2006).

## 2. Definition of Royal Supremacy

After wars of the roses, Henry VII founded the Tudor Dynasty in 1485, and Britain, which was in the transitional period from the Middle Ages to the modern times, experienced a profound religious reform

from top to bottom. Due to the contradiction between new noble and the old aristocracy, the king and the Vatican, Tudor religious reform movement gradually brewed and then broke out. "Royal supremacy" is an important product of the British religious reform, which was formally put forward in the Act of Supremacy. This concept is the opposite of "papal supremacy", which is intended to deny the authority of the Pope in the British religious field and establish Henry VIII's position as the highest authority in the domestic religious circles, and then Henry VIII became the supreme ruler of both spiritual circles and temporal circles.

### *2.1 The Emergence of the Royal Supremacy*

After the 15th century, Tudor Dynasty soon transformed from feudal society to capitalist society. The development of productive forces aggravated social differentiation, and the feudal system did not play an effective role in the new era. A large number of new classes began to engage in industry and commerce, thus becoming capitalists and emerging aristocrats. Although the old aristocrats and Tudor royal family had a high social status and political power, the royal family suffered a serious financial crisis because of their conservative economic ideas, the extravagant life of the royal family, the control of the church on taxation power and the dependence on parliament on financial issues (Qian, 2007). On the contrary, when the old aristocracy was on the wane, new aristocracy, represented by the squire, appeared on the horizon. Because of the contradiction between the old aristocrats and the king, the king and the emerging aristocrats joined forces to restrict the old aristocrats. At the same time, Henry VII promoted some middle and lower classes to become new noble. By cooperating with the middle class, the participation rights of aristocrats in the Privy Council were controlled to strengthen political control and kingship (Qian, 2007).

At the beginning of 16th century, after Henry VIII succeeded to the throne, the contradiction between kingship and religious power became more prominent. The divorce case was the trigger point for Henry VIII to escape from the control of the Christian world, which made him "double leader" of the secular world and the religious world. Henry VIII, who had no male heir, began to plot a divorce case. However, Pope Clement VII never agreed on this divorce request (under the pressure of Charles V), which caused the conflict between the king and the Vatican. Henry VIII convened the Religious Reform Council in 1529 and held seven meetings in a row until 1536. Statutes that promulgated have become the main contents in the process of religious reform, such as An Act for the Restraint of Appeals to Rome, An Act for the King's Highness to be Supreme Head of the Church of England, the inheritance law, and An Act Restraining the Payment of Annates. Among them, the Act of Supremacy passed in 1534 was the most representative one. "His Majesty, his heirs and successors, the kings of this king, should acquire, accept and be called the only supreme head of the church of England called Anglican Church on earth" (Elton, 1982). At the same time, the bill formally put forward the concept of "royal supremacy". The royal power is opposite to the papal power. Since then, the King of England has broken the authority of the Pope, displayed his authoritative position in the religious circles, and became the supreme head of the Church of England and the dual head of the religious and secular

circles.

### *2.2 The Reinforcement of the Royal Supremacy*

The supremacy of kingship was implemented and strengthened while it was established. For example, it is written in the preface of the Act for the Restraint of Appeals to Rome: "England is an empire ... A country divided into secular realm and religious realm, which should submit to the kingship next to God ..." (Williams, 1993). The "empire" here shows that Britain has become a country with independent autonomy and no interference from other religious powers. England has broken through the traditional Christian world's ruling system and dogma, and the nation-state is led by "royal supremacy".

Future generations Edward and Elizabeth have always firmly upheld the supremacy of kingship, and only Mary went against it in order to restore Catholicism. Especially in the Elizabethan period, the Act of Supremacy promulgated once again reiterated: "All foreign powers or authorities, whether secular or religious, were permanently and explicitly abolished in the British Kingdom and the dominions ruled by the British King and other places neither be implemented nor obeyed" (Williams, 1993). It can be seen that kingship represents the national sovereignty, Catholics who insist on faith are regarded as illegal, and kingship is regarded as a major achievement of religious reform.

## **3. Definition of Nation-State in British**

Nation is a national form that emerged in the late Middle Ages of Europe and generally formed in the bourgeois era. It is a new type of country that broke away from the European Middle Ages order (删). Different scholars have different views on the formation of the British nation-state. After analyzing and combining various research conclusions, this paper holds that the British nation-state developed rapidly mainly in Tudor Dynasty.

### *3.1 The Formation Time of British Nation-State*

Many scholars at home and abroad have put forward their own views on the formation period of the British nation-state. Nair, Edwin Jones and other scholars believe that the religious reform has influenced the emergence of the British nation-state. They believe that the religious reform means that England suddenly broke away from Europe in the western Christian world (Jones, 1998). Smith, a scholar, emphasized the role of political struggle in promoting the establishment of modern British nation-state. Compared with the religious reform, political struggle highlights the significance of the "result" of the reform. The victory of kingship gives kingship supremacy, that is, royal supremacy. Whether from the political, economic or cultural point of view, the role of royal supremacy is obvious when under the leadership of kingship. The state can firmly control the sovereignty of the state without the control of the Pope. Especially after Henry VIII's religious reform, the British nation-state began to take shape, or it can be said that it entered a stage of rapid development.

### *3.2 The Formation Process of British Nation-State*

Under the European Christian church system in the Middle Ages, the British royal power was

influenced or even controlled by religious power, and the secular power of the king declined. Most people in the world of Christ are believers, who only know how to be loyal to God but lack national consciousness and national feelings. The formation and establishment of a sovereign state is the result of many factors, including two most important factors-national sovereignty and national unity (Qian, 1991).

The formation process of British nation-state confirms the modern nation-state theory. The formation of English nation-state first needs to master national sovereignty. During the Tudor Dynasty, the contradiction between kingship and religious power gradually became prominent-the problems of judicial trial of the faculty, appointment of senior priests, feudal privileges of the church, and the Pope's arbitrary intervention in politics. After the confrontations, the king who took the initiative got rid of the control of the Pope to Britain. Similarly, national unity is a slow development process. In addition to the "royal supremacy" mentioned above, which promotes national unity in sovereignty, religion and politics. In terms of territory, the four major political entities in Britain-England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland were united by different Merger Acts in different periods. Therefore, from the point of view of the factors affecting the formation of nation-state, whether it is national sovereignty or national unity, the Tudor Dynasty's various reforms and ruling styles play an important role.

#### **4. The Positive Influence of Royal Supremacy**

During Tudor Dynasty, the royal supremacy had a great or less influence on all aspects of the formation of the British nation-state. Then, after the kingship was strengthened and implemented, what specific impetus did it have on the formation of the early British nation-state? The following will elaborate the influence of kingship supremacy on the formation of British nation-state from five aspects: economy, political institutions, local administration, law and national consciousness.

##### *4.1 Economy*

The strengthening of kingship led to economic changes, mainly the confiscation of church property. Economic reform has increased the fiscal revenue, reduced the king's dependence on the church and parliament in finance and taxation. In turn, it strengthened the kingship, and finally brought the economic foundation for the development of the nation-state.

Under the protection of kingship, the stable situation in British has provided a better environment for the economic development. With the continuous development of farming technology, the textile technology of wool textile industry has also been rapidly updated, and the coal industry and metallurgy industry have also developed rapidly.

In addition, the king has always maintained the kingship, avoiding the control of religious forces and getting rid of the high dependence on parliament. Meanwhile, emerging bourgeoisie pursued commercial interests and hoped to be protected by a stable and powerful nation-state, while new aristocracy hoped to increase the royal family income by protecting its own economic development. Therefore, politically, the king joined hands and cooperated with the emerging bourgeoisie and new

aristocracy. They must be given privileges and advantages economically. Economic development and dependence on the country will promote the necessary stability and development of the country.

#### *4.2 Political Institutions*

During the Tudor religious reform, with the need of strengthening kingship and state authority, political reform was put on the agenda. During the reign of Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell succeeded Wolsey as the political representative of Tudor Dynasty since 1532. After the religious reform, the strengthening of kingship made political affairs more complicated, so the government reform was planned by Cromwell.

Reforming government institutions was the first step. The king's secretary, who used to manage letters, documents and other affairs for the king, was promoted to the Chief Minister of State, becoming the core government staff dealing with international and domestic affairs, such as Cecil, Walsingham and others (Xia, 1999). Under the command of the Chief Minister of State, the national instructions were issued by him, and in addition, he handled political affairs with new administrative procedures to improve the efficiency of the government. At the same time, the reform elected core figures from the court meetings to form the Privy Council, among which the Chief Minister of State was the core leader in the Privy Council. Important officials in the Privy Council handle national political affairs through regular meetings.

Secondly, in addition to the changes of major administrative institutions, the government reform also includes the reform of the financial management system. For example, the central government has set up the first-year revenue court and so on. The government reform implemented by Cromwell standardized the power operation procedure, expanded the king's power, strengthened centralization, and established the authority of the central government over the local authorities.

#### *4.3 Local Administration*

Royal supremacy has not only enabled the government to reform effectively, but also prompted the reformed central government to further strengthen its control over local areas while strengthening centralization.

Firstly, the feudal privilege was abolished. In 1536, Thomas Cromwell drafted a decree on concession and free zone. Since then, feudal privileges have been replaced by kingship. This measure has effectively dealt a blow to local feudal centrifugal factors.

Secondly, the central government strengthened its control over the north. Henry VIII reorganized the Northern Parliament and the Northern Court in 1537, and took effective and direct management measures through the kingship and the Privy Council after suppressing the Pilgrimage of Grace in the north. At the same time, the northern region adopted the administrative system generally implemented in Britain, and relied on squires to govern the north. The management historian of the north once pointed out that "the independence of the north collapsed under the centralization imposed by Henry VIII and Cromwell, thus ending its medieval history" (Elton, 1978).

Thirdly, the king promoted the merger of England and Wales through his power. In 1534, the king

appointed Roland Lee to preside over the Welsh Border Court and serve as the President of Parliament. Roland Lee and Thomas Engelfeld's reforms in Wales dealt a heavy blow to the local feudal nobles and strengthened the central government's control over the local areas.

During Tudor period, a relatively complete local management system was established everywhere, the central government and local government gradually formed a unified organic whole, and the administrative divisions of the British nation-state gradually took shape.

#### *4.4 Parliament and Statue*

Parliament and law endowed the kingship with the highest authority. However, the kingship was not subject to parliament. On the contrary, parliament can become the supreme legislature of Britain with the blessing of kingship. This was achieved through the transformation from King-and-Parliament to King-in-Parliament.

The King-in-Parliament can refer to a legislative principle that the king legislates jointly with the upper and lower houses of parliament, a relationship between the king and parliament in the legislative process, and a parliamentary form that appeared in Britain in the 16th century (Bian, 2011). Before Henry VIII, parliamentary legislation was subject to a series of restrictions, including not interfering in religious affairs. However, in 1534, the Act for the Submission of the Clergy passed by parliament restricted the legislative power of the church, which not only reflected the expansion of the legislative scope of King-in-Parliament, but also reflected the performance of cooperation between the king and parliament.

Successive monarchs after Henry VIII continued to strengthen the legislative form of King-in-Parliament. After determining the legislative form of it, the king who has the legislative power will make laws to safeguard the kingship and contribute to the development of the country with the help of parliament. For example, through various statutes, such as the Statute of Uses and the Act of Proclamations, the king has embodied and safeguarded the will of the king in all aspects, reduced feudal and religious privileges, and set up a number of new courts to ensure the implementation of these laws.

#### *4.5 National Consciousness*

National consciousness is equivalent to the soul of a nation-state. If there is no soul, there is no need for the existence of a nation-state. The British national consciousness was constantly strengthened in Tudor Dynasty and reached its climax in Elizabeth's reign.

After the religious reform, Britain got rid of the papal control and became the supreme leader. Until the most authoritative Elizabeth period, the formation of sovereign state and the prosperity of kingship brought the climax of national consciousness. At that time, National consciousness was embodied in the following aspects: firstly, pursuing the mercantilist policy and developing overseas trade; Secondly, strengthening the maritime military strength and making military preparations for entering the sea area; Finally, fighting against Spain (Huang, 2002). The victory over Spain's Invincible Fleet has especially inspired Britain's sense of national pride and superiority, and the call for expanding overseas expansion

and exploration was getting louder and louder, which has laid a solid national spirit and overseas military foundation for Britain to become the second "the empire on which the sun never sets" after Spain.

## 5. The Negative Influence of Royal Supremacy

However, looking at the historical context of the development of the British nation-state, we can find out that the influence of the royal power of Tudor Dynasty on the development and growth of the British nation-state was staged. The essential reason is that the king fundamentally represented the feudal class, which determined that the royal supremacy cannot promote the development of the British nation-state for a long time.

### 5.1 The Essence of Royal Supremacy

The new monarchy is characterized by its newness, so "newness" refers to the cooperation with citizens, new noble and parliament under the condition that the king opposes feudal separatism and the Pope interferes in state affairs, thus being different from the autocratic monarchy. It is an important manifestation of the transition from feudal system to capitalist system, which can be called the middle way besides autocracy and democracy. Just like this, the trend of "new" of new monarchs can't stop the development of parliament and capitalism. From Henry VIII to Elizabeth, the power of parliament has gradually surpassed the royal power and increased. In the Elizabeth period, the power of parliament overstepped the core position of kingship, and the two began to evolve into an equal relationship. Even though the kingship was at its peak, its legitimacy still came from the authorization of parliament, and it was restricted by parliament and laws.

### 5.2 Autocratic Monarchy and Its Adverse Effects

The new monarchy has the characteristics of "newness", but it is hard for people to ignore the true features of its monarchy. The king worked closely with the citizen class and new noble, but this did not mean that the king and Tudor ruling class represented the citizen class, on the contrary, they represented the feudal class. If the scope of royal supremacy continues to expand and the autocratic monarchy lasts indefinitely, it will undoubtedly be devastating to the growth of the British nation-state.

## 6. Conclusion

Tudor Dynasty is in a special period of transition from the Middle Ages to the modern times. The contradiction between the king and the Pope is intertwined with the contradiction between feudal class and the new citizen class, which promotes the formation of the royal supremacy through struggle and compromise. Under the leadership of kingship, economic development laid the economic foundation for the growth of the country. The innovation of political institutions has improved the administrative efficiency of the government. Tudor government established local administrative units and management system in the process of promoting national integration. After a perfect legal system, a series of laws were promulgated to safeguard kingship authority and national development. The



national consciousness of the rise of the nation finally promotes the position of the British nation-state in many countries. The historical direction of development must be correct, and each stage must have its particularity. The kingship of Tudor Dynasty is the embodiment of monarchy, which seems to be contrary to the historical process and the needs of British national development, but in fact it contains "new" factors that just cater to the development direction of nation-state. In a word, analyzing the kingship in the specific historical background, its positive influence on the formation and development of the early British nation-state is certain.

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