



TEMURIDS IN CHINESE SOURCES

Jahongirova Munira Muroddin qizi

3rd-year student of the History program, Faculty of History,
Nizami National Pedagogical University of Uzbekistan

Annotation: *The article discusses information about the state of Amir Temur found in Chinese sources, as well as issues related to trade and diplomatic relations between Amir Temur's empire and China. The study is based primarily on Chinese sources, including Ming Shi ("History of the Ming Dynasty") and Ming Shilu ("Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty"), as well as Chinese scholarly literature. It also presents a number of established facts concerning relations between China and the states of Central Asia.*

Keywords: *Amir Temur, Transoxiana, Chinese sources, trade and diplomatic relations, China, Central Asian countries.*

In 1370, Amir Temur (1336–1405) was proclaimed amir and began to rule over Transoxiana, with Samarkand as his capital. Temur's name is associated with a brief but significant rise of statehood in Central Asia. His campaigns began the following year. In 1371, he launched his first campaign against Moghulistan, and by 1390 he had carried out six more military expeditions. In 1376, Khwarazm was incorporated; in 1381, Khorasan was conquered; and in 1384, the territories of Afghanistan and northern Iran were subdued. By 1393, the southwestern borders of Amir Temur's empire had reached Baghdad.

During the 1380s–1390s, Amir Temur waged war against the Golden Horde and its khan Tokhtamysh, and this conflict ended in Tokhtamysh's defeat. In 1398–1399, Tamerlane invaded India (the Delhi Sultanate). In 1400–1401, Amir Temur subdued part of Syria, captured Damascus, and in 1402, at the Battle of Ankara, he defeated the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I (Bayezid Yildirim).

Thus, over nearly 40 years, he managed to extend his influence across a vast territory. The security of trade routes was ensured everywhere, which significantly stimulated international trade. However, by the mid-14th century, the situation in Central Asia became more complex. This was due to the overthrow of the Mongol Yuan dynasty in China and the rise to power of the Ming Empire (1368–1644). These events had a direct impact on the stability and security of trade routes. As a result, activity along the Silk Road sharply declined.

Amir Temur attached great importance to the development of trade. He understood that for the establishment and prosperity of the state's economy, it was essential to develop trade relations with foreign countries. Therefore, he realized the necessity of ensuring the reliability and security of trade routes both within the country and beyond¹.

The security of caravan routes was ensured, and caravanserais and inns were built along them. Traders were provided with all necessary conveniences and services there. In one of his letters to the Chinese ruler, Amir Temur wrote: "The roads between caravanserais are open, bandits have been eliminated, and now merchants and travelers can feel safe." This information is cited in the book of the Chinese researcher Wang Zhilai².

According to Chinese written sources, Amir Temur sent envoys to China eleven times. This indicates the active development of trade and diplomatic relations. From 1388 onward, envoys led by Mawlana Hafizi, Sheikh Ali, Qurboshi Dalimishi, and others arrived in China almost every year. These accounts are preserved in Chinese written sources, including Ming Shi ("History of the Ming Dynasty") and Ming Shilu leizhuan ("Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty").

¹ Хо'jaev, A. «Великий Шёлковый путь: связи и судьбы» [Buyuk Ipak Yo'li: aloqalar va taqdirlar]. Toshkent: Navoi Publishing House, 2018. 321-b

²Wang Zhilai. "Essays on the History of Central Asia." Changsha, 1986. 559-b

Between 1403 and 1449, a total of 33 diplomatic missions from Samarqand and 14 from Herat arrived in China. Thus, during the period of Amir Temur, the Great Silk Road was restored and further “revitalized”³.

The Ming dynasty also sent commercial and diplomatic embassies to Samarqand. In 1395, the Chinese emperor Taizu sent a court official, Fu An, to Samarqand to accompany Amir Temur’s envoy returning from China. According to the source, they traveled through Jiayuguan (the westernmost point of the Great Wall of China), the Lusa sands, then entered Kumul (present-day Hami), passed through the Khanhai (Gobi Desert), ancient Gaochang, and Ilibali (an ancient city in present-day eastern Kazakhstan), before finally reaching Samarqand.

After arriving in Samarqand, the envoys were effectively placed under “detention” by Amir Temur. Fu An did not voluntarily remain in a foreign land for such a long period; therefore, he was reportedly held by force on Amir Temur’s orders.

“The ruler of this country and his ministers, proud of the great influence of their power, sent the Chinese envoy to visit the most remarkable places of the empire. An official accompanied him. On their journey westward, they visited Talosi (Tabriz) and Isyubaxon (Isfahan), then moved south to Shila (Shiraz). After that, they reached Helu (Herat) through the same route. Helu and other cities covered more than 10,000 li, and when they returned to Samarkand, six years had already passed”⁴.

The conflict between Amir Temur and the Ming Empire arose due to a letter sent by the Ming emperor to Amir Temur, the content of which deeply angered him. In the Ming emperor’s correspondence, Amir Temur was referred to as “wang,” a term meaning prince or vassal ruler. The Uzbek sinologist A. Khojayev believes that this was due to the Ming Empire’s unwillingness to establish equal and friendly relations with Amir Temur.

³ Буриев, О., & Колганов, А. «Об одном участке Великого шёлкового пути». В: «На среднеазиатских трассах Великого Шёлкового пути». Ташкент: Фан, 1990, с. 107

⁴ Bretschneider, E. “Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources...” London, 1888. 144-145-b

According to him, “Based on the traditional philosophy of the superiority and greatness of the Chinese rulers, the Ming emperors considered themselves supreme sovereigns and desired to control all states. This idea was completely unfamiliar to other peoples, states, and rulers and contradicted their interests”⁵.

Only after the death of Amir Temur was Fu An allowed to return to his homeland. According to Ming Shi (“History of the Ming Dynasty”), the Chinese envoy returned home in 1407 after 12 years of absence. Fu An later wrote a poetic collection titled “Siyui Shenlan Shi” (“Poems on the Wonders Seen During the Journey to the West”). This work was published by Fu An’s friends.

As for the first diplomatic mission to Samarkand by another famous Chinese diplomat and traveler, Chen Cheng, some Chinese sources state that it was undertaken precisely because Fu An had been “detained” by Amir Temur.

Chen Cheng himself visited the countries of Central Asia several times and described them in his works. Among his most famous works are “Siyuxing Chenzheng” (“Travel Records, or Diary of a Journey to the West”) and “Siyufan Guozhi” (“Description of the Western Frontier States”). Chen Cheng (also known by his second name Zi Lu and his pen name Zhu Shan) was born in Jiangxi (Jishui). In 1394, he became a jinshi and served in various government positions for many years⁶.

In 1413, when envoys and tribute missions from Herat, Samarkand, and other countries of Central and Southwest Asia came to China with gifts, Emperor Yongle sent his own envoy with them, and Chen Cheng accompanied this mission. He returned from the mission to Beijing two years later⁷.

After returning from this journey, in 1413–1415 Chen Cheng wrote his famous works. “Siyuxing Chenzheng” was a travel diary of his journeys to the countries of Central Asia. In his other work, “Siyufanguozhi,” Chen Cheng reflected the

⁵ Хо’jaev, A. «Великий Шёлковый путь: связи и судьбы» [Buyuk Ipak Yo’li: aloqalar va taqdirlar]. Toshkent: Navoi Publishing House, 2018. 325-b

⁶ Wen Ying. “Western Cities in Chen Cheng's Poems.” Wulumuqi, 1987. 80-b

⁷ “Mingshi” [History of the Ming Dynasty]. Shanghai, 1958. 31865-b

historical situation of the countries he had visited. He recorded many interesting details about the geography, customs, and traditions of these regions. At times, he also covered the political, economic, and cultural life of the local population.

He traveled through Kumul, Turpan, Tashkent, and Samarkand on his way to Herat, and his works are considered an important source for the early Ming dynasty history of these regions. Both works were written approximately at the same time.

Chen Cheng begins his account from the Jiayuguan post: “On 17 January 1413, I passed through Jiayuguan.” Jiayuguan is a frontier post located in Gansu Province, at the western end of the Great Wall of China, to the west of the city of the same name. The fortress was established in 1372 on a mountain slope and served as an important control point on the trade route for caravans traveling between China and the West and returning back.

After that, the travelers passed through Kumul (Hami), Lapchuk (Lazhu-chen), Qorakhoj (Karakhoja, Khocho), Ilibalik (an ancient city in present-day eastern Kazakhstan), and Beshbaliq (an ancient city in present-day Eastern Turkestan), and finally reached Khotan (Yutian).

Khotan is an ancient region in Central Asia, located in the southern part of the Tarim River basin and known from the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE. The territory of the region was relatively small—in practice, it was a vast oasis irrigated by the waters of the Yurungkash and Karakash rivers flowing down from the Kunlun Mountains⁸.

Chen Cheng’s next “stop” was Turpan (Tuerfan), where he stayed for one day. After that, the Chinese envoy visited Yarkhoto (Yayer) and Yanzhe (Yancheng). In “Siyufan Guozhi,” Chen Cheng writes about this as follows: “To the north of the city there is a low mountain, where they extract hard white salt like stone. A vessel can be polished with it and filled with meat, because salt is the main product of this city, and therefore it is called Yancheng (Salt City)”⁹.

⁸ Малявкин, А. Г. «Историческая география Центральной Азии». Новосибирск, 1981 203-b

⁹ Chen Cheng. “Journey to the West Diary.” Beijing, 1936. 18-b

Yancheng, Yanzhe-cheng, and Doucze-cheng refer to Yan or Doucze city, which was founded during the Han dynasty. Its ruler, Chagatai Khan Tughlugh (Tuheylyu), the youngest son of Timur, Haydar Khoja, ascended the throne in 1383 and died in 1399. During his travels, Chen Cheng visited his tomb.

The next stop on Chen Cheng's route was Taraz (Yangyi). He arrived in the city in June 1413. Taraz (Yangi, Yangyi, Yangi) is located along the Syr Darya River, on its left bank. In Mirza Muhammad Haydar's "Tarikh-i Rashidi," it is mentioned under names such as "Taraz, also called Yangi" and "Yangi, referred to in historical books as Taraz"¹⁰.

In the 15th century, Taraz, which began to be rebuilt during Amir Temur's era, later declined due to invasions by Mongol and Beshbaliq tribes¹¹.

After Taraz, the travelers reached Sayram (Sailanma-cheng). Sayram (Sailanma-cheng, Isfijab) is located near the city of Shymkent (Southern Kazakhstan). Situated on the caravan route, the city was like a crossroads of the Silk Road. Caravans coming from Taraz were "forced to stop in Isfijab before continuing to Shasha (Tashkent), the heart of Transoxiana." During the time of Genghis Khan, Sayram was destroyed and remained abandoned until the early Ming dynasty period¹².

In early July 1413, the Chinese envoys arrived in Tashkent. In "Xiyu Fanguo Zhi," there is limited information about Tashkent: "Dashican (Tashkent) is located west of the city of Sailan (Sayram), about 700 li from Samarkand. The city has a circumference of 2 li and is situated on a plain. It is surrounded by hills on all sides, with many gardens, rivers flowing through it, fertile fields, a dense population, and ox carts are the main means of transport."

In the late Middle Ages, the name "Chochi" appears only in "Yuan Shi" ("History of the Yuan Dynasty"), and the new name "Tashi" is also found in this

¹⁰ Бартольд, В. В. «Сочинения». В 9 т., т. 3. Москва, 1965, с. 492–493.

¹¹ Pishchulina, K. A. «Юго-Восточный Казахстан в середине XIV – начале XVI вв.» [Xorijiy Sharqiy Qozog'iston XIV asr o'rtalari – XVI asr boshlarida]. Olmaota, 1977. 138-b

¹² Байтанаев, Б. А. «Древний Испиджаб». Шымкент–Алматы, 2003. 3-4-b

work. In “Ming Shi,” the full form “Dashican” appears for the first time, and later during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), the city became known as Tashkhan or Tashigan.

In his travel notes, Chen Cheng does not mention exactly when he passed through the region of Bukhara, but a brief description of the place is given in “Xiyu Fanguo Zhi”: “Bukhara is located 700 li west of Samarkand. The city has a circumference of more than 10 li and is situated on a plain. Its people are wealthy, and the houses and courtyards of the city are densely built. The land is moist, and even in winter it remains humid without turning dry. It is suitable for the cultivation of the five main food crops, as well as mulberry and hemp (flax).”

As a result of the shortening of the toponym “Anxi,” the name “An (Anguo)” emerged, under which Bukhara was well known during the Tang dynasty. In Chinese written sources, various transcriptions of the toponym Bukhara can be found, such as Fuxu, Numi, Buho, Buxe, and Puxu. According to V. V. Bartold, this region corresponds to the area of the modern village of Vardona, located west of Bukhara, on the edge of the desert.

The period of Amir Temur is distinguished as an era that ensured political and military stability in Transoxiana and the wider Central Asian region, expanded his empire, and actively developed trade and diplomatic relations. Under Temur’s rule, Samarkand was consolidated as the capital, and through his conquests, Khwarazm, Khorasan, Afghanistan, northern Iran, and territories as far as Baghdad on the southwestern frontier were brought under control. At the same time, Temur strengthened his position in international politics through his campaigns against the Golden Horde, India, and Syria.

Amir Temur’s economic and trade-political activities are particularly notable for their focus on the development of international trade along the Great Silk Road. The security of caravan routes, as well as the construction of caravanserais and inns, created favorable conditions for merchants. In addition, active diplomatic relations

were established with foreign states through embassies in Samarkand and other cities.

Trade and diplomatic relations with China, as well as the tensions that arose with the Ming dynasty, demonstrate Amir Temur's aspiration for an independent and equal status in international politics.

Information obtained through Chinese sources such as Chen Cheng and Fu An provides a broad and detailed understanding of the political, economic, and cultural life of Central Asia during the reign of Amir Temur, as well as the geographical, economic, and demographic conditions of its cities and regions. Thus, the Timurid Empire was not only a powerful military and political center in Central Asia but also a major force in economic and cultural development. It played an important role in the revival of the Great Silk Road, a fact also confirmed by Chinese sources of that period.

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