



## CHINESE SOURCES ON THE AMIR TEMUR EMPIRE

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### ABSTRACT

The article discusses the information about the Empire of Amir Timur containing in Chinese sources, as well as the issues of trade and diplomatic relations between the Empire of Amir Timur and China. The article is based on materials from Chinese sources, primarily the Ming Shi (History of the Ming Dynasty) and the Ming Shilu (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty), as well as data from Chinese scholarly literature. It presents several little-known facts about the relations between China and Central Asian states.

### KEYWORDS

Amir Timur, Maverannahr, Chinese sources, trade and diplomatic relations, China, Central Asian countries.

### INTRODUCTION

In 1370, Amir Timur (1336-1405) was proclaimed Emir and began to rule the territory of Maverannahr with its capital in Samarkand. Timur's name is associated with a short-lived rise of statehood in Central Asia. His conquests began the following year. In 1371, he undertook his first campaign against Moghulistan, and by 1390, he had undertaken six more military campaigns. In 1376, Khwarezm was absorbed, in 1381 there was an invasion of Khorasan, and in 1384 the

territories of Afghanistan and Northern Iran were subjugated. By 1393, the southwestern borders of Amir Timur's Empire reached Baghdad.

In the 1380s and 1390s, Amir Timur waged war against the Golden Horde and its khan Tokhtamysh, which ended in the latter's defeat. In 1398-1399, Tamerlane invaded India (the Delhi Sultanate). In 1400-1401, Amir Timur subjugated part of Syria, captured Damascus,

and in 1402 he defeated the Turkish Sultan in the Battle of Ankara.

Thus, in the course of almost 40 years, he managed to spread his influence over a vast territory. Security of trade routes was ensured everywhere, which significantly revived international trade. After all, it was a period of great troubles.

In the middle of the 13th century, the political situation in Central Asia became more complicated. In China, the Mongol Yuan dynasty was overthrown and the Ming Empire (1368-1644) was proclaimed. These events had an impact on the tranquility and security of trade routes, as a result of which activity on the Silk Road sharply decreased.

Amir Timur attached great importance to the development of trade, as he understood that for the establishment and prosperity of the state's economy, it was necessary to develop trade relations with foreign countries, so it was necessary to ensure the reliability and security of trade routes within the country and beyond its borders [17: 321].

Security of caravan routes was guaranteed, along which caravanserais, transfer points and inns were built, where traders were provided with all the amenities and necessary services. In one of his letters to the Chinese ruler (Ming), Amir Timur wrote: "The roads between the caravanserais are open, the robbers have been destroyed, now traders and travelers can feel safe." This information is found in the book of the Chinese researcher Wang Zhilai [7: 559].

According to Chinese written sources, Amir Timur sent an embassy 11 times, which indicates the active development of trade and diplomatic relations. Starting from 1388, almost every year embassies arrived in China, led by Mawlana Hafizi, Sheikh Ali,

Kurbashi Dalimishi and others. This information is contained in Chinese written sources, including "Ming Shi" ("History of the [Ming] Dynasty") [4] and "Ming Shilu" leizyuan (Materials of the "True Records of the [Ming] Dynasty" by sections) [5].

During the period from 1403 to 1449, 33 embassy missions from Samarkand and 14 from Herat arrived in China [11: 107]. Thus, during the reign of Amir Timur, the Great Silk Road was reactivated.

The Ming dynasty also sent trade and diplomatic embassies to Samarkand.

In 1395, the Chinese official Fu An [13] was sent by Emperor Taizu [1] to Samarkand to accompany the ambassador of Amir Timur returning home from China. As the source reports, along the way they passed Jiayuguan (the easternmost point of the Great Wall of China), Lusa sands [2], then entered Kumul (at that time Hami), passed Hanhai (the Gobi Desert), ancient Gaochang, Ilibali (Ilibalyk) and reached Samarkand. When the envoys arrived in Samarkand, Amir Timur detained him. Fu An was not disposed to remain in a foreign country for such a long period of time voluntarily and was left forcibly, by order of Amir Timur.

"The ruler of this country and his ministers were proud of the great influence of their power and sent the Chinese envoy to visit the most remarkable places of the Empire. The officer accompanied him. On the journey to the west, they visited Talosi (Tabriz), Isyubahan (Isfahan), then [turned] south [reached] Shilasa (Shiraz), and on the way back passed through Heilu (Hale, Herat) and other cities. They covered over 10,000 li, and when they returned to Samarkand, six years had already passed" [1: 144-145].

Tension between the empires of Amir Timur and Ming arose due to a letter from the Ming emperor to Amir Timur, the tone of which greatly angered the latter. In the letters of the Ming emperor, Amir Timur was called a "wan", which meant a prince or a vassal ruler. Uzbek sinologist A. Khodzhaev believes that this was due to the fact that it was the Ming Empire that did not want to have friendly relations with Amir Timur on an equal footing. He notes that "the desire of the Ming emperors to consider themselves the supreme rulers, controlling all states, based on the traditional philosophy of Chinese rulers about their own superiority and greatness, was completely unfamiliar to other peoples, states and rulers, and contradicted their interests" [17: 325].

Only after the death of Amir Timur was Fu An allowed to return home. According to the "Ming shi" ("History of the [Ming] Dynasty"), the Chinese envoy returned home in 1407, after 12 years of absence. Fu An wrote a collection of poems "Siyuishenlanshi" ("Poems about the wondrous things seen in the journey to the West") [1], which was published by Fu An's friends.

As for the first diplomatic mission of another famous Chinese diplomat and traveler, Chen Chen, to Samarkand, according to some Chinese sources, it was carried out precisely because Fu An was detained by Amir Timur.

Chen Chen himself visited the countries of Central Asia several times and described them in his works, among which the most famous are "Siyuxingchenzheng" ("Travel notes, or Diary of a journey to the West") [2] and "Siyufanguozhi" ("Description of the states of the Western Frontier") [3]. Chen Chen (his second name was Zi Lu) nicknamed Zhu Shan, was a native of Jiangxi (Jishuai City). He became a jinshi [2] in 1394 and served for many years in various government positions [8: 80].

When in 1413 embassies from Herat, Samarkand and other states of Central and South-West Asia arrived in China with gifts, Emperor Ming Chengzu [3] sent a return embassy with them, in which Chen Chen was also present as an accompanying person. He returned from the journey to Beijing (Peking) two years later [4: 31865b].

After returning from this journey, Chen Chen compiled his famous works. "Siyuxingchenzheng" is a travel diary of a journey to the countries of Central Asia, which he made in 1413-1415, and in "Siyufanguozhi" Chen Chen reflected the historical situation in the states he visited, recorded many interesting information about the relief of the terrain, the customs and traditions of the local population, and sometimes covered the political, economic and cultural life of these states. He traveled through Kumul, Turpan, Tashkent, Samarkand to Herat, and his works are important sources for the history of these countries at the beginning of the Ming era. Both works were written approximately at the same time (1413-1415).

Chen Chen begins his narrative with the Jiayuguan outpost: "January of 1413, 17th day, passed the Jiayuguan outpost." Jiayuguan is a border outpost at the western end of the Great Wall of China, in the Gansu Province, west of the homonymous city. The outpost was established in 1372 on the side of a mountain and was an important checkpoint on the way of trade caravans from China to the West and back.

Then the travelers passed through Kumul (Hami), Lapchuk (Lazhu-chen), Karahodzh (Karahodjo, Khodzho), Ilibalyk (Ilibali), Beshbalyk (Beshibali) and arrived in Khotan (Yuytian).

Khotan is an ancient state in Central Asia, in the southern part of the Tarim Basin, known since the 3rd-2nd centuries BC. The territory of the state was small -

practically, this is a vast oasis, irrigated by the waters of the Yurunkash and Karakash rivers, flowing down from the Kunlun Mountains [14: 203].

The next stop for Chen Chen was Turpan (Tuerfan), where he stayed for one day. Then, the Chinese embassy visited Yarkhoto (Yayer) and Yanzhe (Yancheng), about which Chen Chen writes in "Siyufanguozhi": "To the north of the city there is a low mountain, [there] they extract salt, hard, white, like stone. You can polish a vessel [from salt], fill it with meat, vegetables and not salt it. Because of this [the city] received the name Yanzhe-cheng (Salty City)" [2: 18].

Yan-cheng, Yanzhe-cheng, Doucze-cheng - the city of Yan or Doucze, was founded during the Han dynasty. Its ruler, Haidar Khoja, the youngest son of the Chagatai Khan Tuhelo (Tuheylyu) Timur, ascended to the throne in 1383 and died in 1399. Chen Chen visited his grave during his travels.

The next stop on Chen Chen's way was Taraz (Yangyi). His Chinese embassy visited in June 1413. Taraz (Yangi, Yangyi, Yangi) is a city at the mouth of the Syr Darya, on its left bank [10: 492-493]. In "Tarikh-i Rashidi" by Mirza Muhammad Haidar, "Taraz, which was otherwise called Yangi" and "Yangi, which is called Taraz in historical books" are mentioned [16: 138]. Taraz, which began to be built up under Amir Timur in the 15th century, then fell into decline due to raids by Mongol and Beshbalik tribes.

After Taraz, the travelers arrived in Sairam (Sailanma-cheng). Sairam (Sailanma-cheng, Isfijab) is located near the city of Shymkent (South Kazakhstan). Located on the caravan route, the city was like a crossroads on the Silk Road. Caravans following from Taraz had to stop at "Isfijab and went further to Shasha (Tashkent) deep into Maverannahr" [9: 3-4]. Under Genghis Khan,

Sairam was destroyed and remained abandoned until the beginning of the Ming Era. This allowed Chen Chen to doubt the strategic importance of Sairam.

At the beginning of July 1413, the Chinese embassy reached Tashkent. There is not much information about Tashkent in the "Xiyu Fanguo Zhi": "Dashican (Tashkent) is located to the west of Sailan (Sairam), more than 700 li from Samarkand. The city is 2 li in circumference and is located on a plain. There are hills on all sides, many gardens, dense trees, and long rivers flowing. The land is favorable for crops, densely populated, and the main burden is on renting ox carts."

In the late Middle Ages, the name Chach as Chachi only occurred in the "Yuan Shi" (History of the Yuan Dynasty), and the new name Tashi is also found there. In the "Ming Shi", the unabbreviated version of the name Dashican appears for the first time, and later, during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), it is known as Tashkhan or Tashigan.

Chen Cheng did not mention when they passed through the Bukhara area in his travel notes, but the "Xiyu Fanguo Zhi" contains a brief description of this place: "Bukhara is located 700 li west of Samarkand. The city is more than 10 li in circumference and is located on a plain. The people are rich, the housing is dense, the city streets are lively, and there are countless courtyards (10,000). The land is humid below and the climate is mild. Winter does not affect wetness and dryness, and it is suitable for the five major food crops, mulberry, and hemp (flax). In winter, people eat raw vegetables, beef, mutton, fish, swans, chickens, rabbits, and everything is available."

Under the name An (Anguo), formed by shortening the toponym Anxi, Bukhara was well known in the Tang Empire. Various transcriptions of the toponym Bukhara are found in Chinese written sources: Fuho, Numi,



Buho, Buhe, Puhu, Bukhara, Bukhuala, Bukhala. According to V.V. Bartol'd, this is the modern village of Vardizi, located west of Bukhara, on the edge of the desert.

The Chinese visited Shahruhiyah (Shalukhaya) and its ruler on July 13 of the same year. Chen Cheng describes Shahruhiyah in the "Xiyu Fanguo Zhi" as follows: "Shalukhaya (Shahruhiyah) is located to the east of Samarkand (Samarkand) almost 500 li away, and the city is built on a small hill... The land produces thick grass, the stem... is no higher than a chi, the stem and leaves are similar to an umbrella (cap, cover), it appears in spring and dies in autumn, and the stench follows people. They are interested in the juice, which is added to the preparation of fatty meat (lard), and is called "a-wei"... There is also a small grass, 1-2 chi high, with a bushy stem covered in thorny thorns, the leaves are thin like [those of an orchid], in the cool autumn... the dew thickens and forms [like] pearls that adorn the stems and branches. It is sweet, [to taste] similar to honey, and can instantly turn into sugar, it is called "da-lan-gu-bin", also "sweet dew" ("gan-lu").

After stopping in Shiraz, the embassy finally arrived in Samarkand. Chen Cheng describes this city in detail in the "Xiyu Fanguo Zhi": "Samarkand is located to the northeast of Khale (Herat), to the east... more than 9900 li to Jiayuguan, and to the southwest more than 2800 li to Khale (Herat). The terrain is beautiful, the land is fertile and productive. A mountain stream flows to the north, and to the east of the city is the plain on which it is built, which is more than 10 li in length from east to west and 5-6 li from south to north. It is surrounded by a wall with six gates. On the north side, there is a dry moat. To the northwest of the city is a secondary fortress. The city is large and prosperous. There are many people living in the city. There are markets on all the streets of the city. Merchants from

the south and west come to the city to trade. They bring many goods to trade. They use silver coins that are minted by each state. Merchants from Herat also come to the city to trade.

Alcohol and the slaughter of cows and sheep are prohibited in the city. If someone buys meat, they cannot eat it raw. They must cook it and bury the blood. There is a mosque in the northeast part of the city. The rules of the mosque are very strict. Everyone in the city is healthy.

The mosque is made of lapis lazuli. It has a four-sided gallery with a large central hall. The holy scriptures in the mosque are all wrapped in sheepskin. The letters of the scriptures are gilded. The people of the city are skilled artisans. They produce gold, silver, copper, steel, felt, and carpets. There are many different kinds of trees in the city, including white poplars, willows, peaches, apricots, pears, plums, and grapes. The red soil is suitable for growing five major crops.

Samarkand was indeed famous for its bookbinders. Special bookbinders worked in the libraries of the khans and emirs. Their work was known far beyond the city. For example, sources mention a Koran with a leather cover, a leather case, and a velvet wrapper.

The state of Siwanjin was one of the first Chinese transcriptions of the name of the city of Samarkand. The city was first mentioned in Greek sources as Maracanda. In ancient and early medieval times, the area where Samarkand was located was called Kangju in Chinese writings. Later, it was called Kango.

On August 11, the Chinese embassy set out south. The travelers entered a mountain gorge and then crossed a famous stone gorge called Temingguan (Iron Gates).

On August 15, the embassy continued south. They passed through a large village and then reached the

banks of a river about 50 li away. The river was called the Amu Darya. There were seven or eight small boats on the river. On the east bank of the river was a city called Dalimi (Termez). The embassy camped on the riverbank for two days and then crossed the river.

Chen Cheng writes in "Siyuifanggozhi" about Termez: "Dalimi (Termez) is located southwest of Samaerkan (Samarkand), more than 2,000 li from Khale (Herat). The city is located on the eastern bank of the Amu River, the water flows between sheer cliffs, the river is relatively wide, we crossed it with difficulty in boats, we passed dangerous and inaccessible [places], using the advantages of the rugged terrain. There are several hundred families living in the city and outside, livestock is thriving, there are many fish in the river. It takes more than 10 li to get to the old city, the lands to the east of the river are subject to Samaerkan (Samarkand), to the west of the river, they say, lions were bred in reed thickets here" [3: 13].

The "Ming Shi" repeats this information and adds: "There is a new and old city, [their] distance [from each other] is more than 10 li. The leader of their tribe resides in the new city. In the city and beyond it, there are only a few hundred families. [They] are engaged in cattle breeding. The city is located on the eastern [bank] of the Ashu-he [in which] there are many fish. To the east of the river, the lands belong to Samaerkan (Samarkand), to the west of the river, there are many reed thickets, [where] lions were bred. Chen Cheng and Li Da were sent to these lands" [4: 31868].

The state of Damo (Termez) occupied the area to the north of Guzgan on the left and right banks of the Amu Darya. The ruins of the ancient city of Termez are located on the northern (right) bank of the Amu Darya, northwest of the confluence of the Surkhob River (Kunduz) with it and northwest of Balkh [15: 300].

On the 20th, the travelers stopped for two days near Balkh (Balahe), which was destroyed during the invasion of Genghis Khan, but since it was an important point on the Silk Road, it was very quickly revived. During Chen Cheng's journey, the city was completely restored. Some researchers (E. Chavannes) identified the city of Boqi, mentioned in Han texts, with the city of Bactria - modern Balkh. The city of Bactria has been known since ancient times, it was the capital of Bactria, and then for some time the Kushan kingdom. Its ruins are located near the modern city of Balkh and occupy a large area. A wall 85 km long was built to protect Bactria and the surrounding area.

On August 23, the Chinese embassy headed west, then northwest, and after about 100 li they camped for rest in Heshi (Shakhrisabz).

Chen Cheng reports about Shakhrisabz in "Siyuifanggozhi": "Heshi (Shakhrisabz) is located southwest of Samaerkan (Samarkand), approximately 260 li, the city is located among trees, in circumference more than 10 li, on all sides are large, irrigated fields, not far to the southwest are mountains. There is one garden in the city. They say that in ancient times the city was built by the supreme ruler Timur. In the center there were several dozen tall palaces, grandiose in scale, spacious, with remarkably towering, covered galleries. In the ceremonial halls, the corners were decorated with columns of white stone resembling jade, several chi high. The walls were decorated with gold and jade, the windows were decorated with glaze. Unfortunately, everything is destroyed" [3: 15-15a].

Shakhrisabz, also known as Shigo, Kesh, Heshi, and Yuheshi, flourished during the reign of Amir Timur, but was later destroyed in the aftermath of the Mongol invasions. The Sui shu (History of the Sui Dynasty ) mentions that "the capital of the state of Shi (Kesh) is located ten li south of the Dumo River" [6: 13b]. The

above excerpts from Chinese writings describe Shakhrisabz in its heyday, as it was the city where Amir Timur resided. However, in the early 15th century, during Chen Cheng's journey, it was already in ruins.

In the 9th month, the travelers finally reached Herat (Hale). Chen Cheng's account of Herat at that time is quite detailed, but we will only present the most interesting excerpts here:

- "Herat, also known as Heilu, is located southwest of Samaerkan (Samarkand)... Its lands are located on a plain...

- In the northeast of the main city of the state, there is a mound of building materials... It resembles a tall temple, without beams, and ceramic tiles surround the empty rooms. Several dozen rooms, walls, windows... are painted with gold and turquoise, the door panels are carved with colored patterns, inlaid with ivory, and the floor is covered with felt. Next to the room, there is still a tent for rest. Inside, there is a golden bed covered with a coverlet... There are no chairs, only a mat to sit on with crossed legs...

- The inhabitants cook little food, and it seems that they buy food and drink from the shops. Previously, the city shops did not lock their doors at night. Lanterns and candles are lit until sunset. Silver coins are used in trade...

- In the capital, there is a large earthen house called the Haider Fortress (Heider-sai), with a gallery of living quarters on all four sides. In the courtyard, there is a bronze vessel in the shape of a large cauldron, several fathoms in circumference, with inscriptions carved on it. The vessel resembles a tripod. There are buildings in front, behind, to the right, and to the left. Many wandering students and passing merchants gather here... [3: 1-11].

Herat was the last city-state in Central and Southwest Asia that Chen Cheng visited and described.

It is important to note that the information from Chen Cheng's writings was almost completely incorporated into the section of the Ming shi (History of the Ming Dynasty) on Central Asian countries.

We can conclude that trade and diplomatic relations between China and the states of Central Asia during the reign of Amir Timur and his descendants developed quite intensively, as evidenced by the materials from Chinese sources.

It should be noted that, despite the frequent conflicts between the rulers of the Central Asian states and the Ming Dynasty, as well as the strife between the rulers themselves, relatively stable and regular trade relations were established in the Ming era. These relations contributed to the development of economic and cultural ties between the two sides and had a great significance for the economic life of the population. The revived Silk Road played a huge role in that.

As we can see, the Chinese historical works used in this article contain numerous facts that are of historical and cultural value to researchers of the medieval history of the cities of Central Asia, in particular the Empire of Amir Timur. The significance of in-depth research of such historical materials for the study of the history of Central Asian peoples is undoubtedly great.

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