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## SOCIAL LIFE UNDER THE TIMURIDS BASED ON CHEN CHENG'S "HSI-YU-HSING-CH'ENG-CHI"

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**Annotation.** This article analyzes Travel Notes on the Western Regions by Chen Cheng, a Chinese envoy sent by the Chinese Empire to the eastern and most powerful neighbor of the Timurid state. In particular, the study examines the valuable information recorded by Chen Cheng in 1414 concerning several cities of the Timurid state, such as Herat, Samarkand, and Bukhara. He describes these regions and records his own observations about their inhabitants, which are analyzed on the basis of contemporary historical sources.

**Keywords:** The Timurid period, Shahrukh Mirza, Chen Cheng, Travel Notes on the Western Regions, Herat, Samarkand.

**Introduction.** The major trade stations of the Great Silk Road were spread directly across the territory of Central Asia, which increased the region's attractiveness for neighboring states. From the earliest periods, both merchants and rulers showed great interest in this area; in particular, the Chinese ruling dynasties sought to obtain more detailed information about Central Asia. Relations with China continued actively during the reign of Amir Timur and the Timurids as well.

The state founded by Amir Timur occupied vast territories stretching from China to Asia Minor, and as a result gained control over the Silk Road. During this period, the foreign trade relations of the Timurid state developed significantly. Undoubtedly, the most powerful eastern neighbor of the Timurid state was the Chinese Empire. In order to obtain detailed information about the Timurid state, the Ming dynasty in China organized several diplomatic missions. These diplomatic relations developed especially after the death of Amir Timur, during the reign of Shahrukh Mirza.

The Chinese emperor sent envoys to Samarkand and Herat on several occasions, and in turn the ruler of the Timurid state also organized reciprocal diplomatic missions. One of the envoys sent by the Ming Empire was Chen Cheng, who visited the Timurid state in 1414. During his journey, he regularly sent reports of his observations and experiences to the Ming court, and his memoirs were later compiled in a work entitled "Hsi-yu-hsing-ch'eng-chi" (Travel Accounts of the Western Regions).

After the death of Zhu Yuanzhang of the Ming dynasty in 1398, internal struggles for power began, during which the imperial throne was eventually seized by his son Zhu Di. His reign became known as the Yongle era (1403–1424). Zhu Di promoted the development of the empire's economy and cultural life and expanded its borders. In foreign policy, not only were military campaigns organized, but diplomatic missions were also actively conducted. It





was precisely during his reign that the expeditions led by Zheng He were organized, reaching as far as the eastern coasts of Africa across the seas. Zhu Di also sought to obtain detailed information about Central Asia and established active diplomatic relations with the region [4, 132–136].

Zhu Di actively sent his envoys to Samarkand to the court of Khalil Sultan and to Herat to the court of Shahrukh Mirza. In one of the letters he sent to Shahrukh Mirza regarding the conflicts with Khalil Sultan, he wrote:

“I recently heard that a war broke out between you and your nephew, and this greatly saddened me. If those who belong to the same family love one another, they can resist the attacks and invasions of external enemies... From now on, you should stop the war, increase the population, maintain your kinship ties, and live together in peace and tranquility.” [3, 268]

As can be seen from this letter, the Chinese emperor closely monitored the political situation in the region and sought opportunities to exert his influence. Among the envoys whom he sent several times to the western regions, one was Chen Cheng.

As noted above, particularly during the reign of Shahrukh Mirza, the Timurids maintained active diplomatic relations with the Ming Empire. The most intensive period of diplomatic contacts between the Ming Empire and the Timurids also falls within this era. Specifically, in 1408, envoys led by Fu An, dispatched by the Yongle Emperor, arrived in Herat at the court of Shahrukh Mirza, presenting the imperial letter and silk fabrics. In the same year, it is also recorded that reciprocal envoys were sent from Herat to China. In 1409, envoys once again led by Fu An paid a visit to Herat.

Moreover, the multiple visits of missions headed by the Chinese envoy Chen Cheng to Samarkand and Herat also date precisely to the reign of Shahrukh Mirza [3, 312–315]. In their reports, these envoys left important information concerning the political, socio-economic, and cultural life of the period. Among these, the records of envoys such as Chen Cheng and Ghiyath al-Din Naqqash have survived to the present day. Among these works, the most noteworthy are undoubtedly the reports written by the Chinese envoy.

Typically, the Chinese selected envoys of foreign origin, but the envoy Chen Cheng, sent by Zhu Di, was a native Chinese. He was born in Jiangxi and entered state service in 1394. In particular, he served as a military adviser in the northwestern provinces of China and took part in the construction of defensive strongholds such as An-ting, A-tuan, and Ch’u-hsien. He was appointed as an official responsible for resolving border disputes between the king of Annam and the people of Guangxi. In addition, he served in the government as an official of the Ministry of Rites, responsible for matters concerning envoys arriving from abroad [1, 13–14].

Due to his experience in dealing with foreigners and his knowledge of several foreign languages, Chen Cheng was sent as an envoy to the “Western





Regions” on four occasions, three of which were to the Samarkand–Herat area [3, 72].

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, it can be emphasized that the accounts recorded by foreign envoys constitute a valuable source for studying the history of Amir Timur and the Timurid period. In particular, the reports of the Ming imperial envoys, who maintained close diplomatic relations with the Timurid state, convey important information that is not found in the works of Timurid-era chroniclers.

After the death of Amir Timur, diplomatic relations with China intensified and reached their peak during the reign of Shahrukh Mirza. During his rule, numerous Chinese envoys arrived in the Timurid lands, while envoys of the Timurid ruler regularly visited Beijing. A great deal of information about the diplomatic missions organized by China has been preserved in the chronicles of the Ming dynasty. However, these chronicles do not extensively describe the social life of the population.

Chen Cheng, an envoy who visited the Timurid state on several occasions, sent a detailed report to the court in Beijing describing his journey of 1414. These reports were later compiled as a separate work and, compared to the official chronicles, provide abundant information about the population of the Timurid state. His accounts, especially those concerning the capital city of Herat, are particularly noteworthy. He describes important aspects of the daily life of the city’s inhabitants based on his own observations. Chen Cheng’s work also preserves valuable information about women during the Timurid period. The envoy’s notes constitute an important source for determining the role of women in social life during this era and for clarifying the details of their everyday lives.

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