

التاريخ الحديث

On May 9, 1421, lightning from Heaven struck the Yung-lo Emperor's new palace. Five days later, in public penance, the emperor solemnly pronounced the duties in his charge: "Reverently we hold the mandate of Heaven to rule both China and foreigners."¹ The fulfillment of these duties had been and would remain the basic policy objective of imperial China's throne. Benign guidance over an obedient world was an emperor's cherished ambition and the basis of his self-image.

"Tribute" from Central Asia

On the distant fringes of the world that China knew and sought to lead lay Central Asia, sprawling and diverse. Mountains divided it, and deserts made much of it unfit to sustain a sedentary population. Central Asia's people, concentrated in the river valleys, lived by oasis farming and trade. Outside the river valleys only the nomad could live off the land, grazing his animals on the sparse vegetation of the semidesert.

The recorded history of China's relations with Central Asia goes back

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to 126 B.C., when Chang Ch'ien returned from a mission that had been sent to form an alliance against the Huns.² There had been times, as in the Han (206 B.C.—A.D. 220) and T'ang (618–907) dynasties, when China's actual military control had extended into Central Asia, but more recently, during the Yüan dynasty (1234–1368, the period of Mongolian rule), the current had flowed in the other direction, and Central Asian administrators, merchants, technicians, and craftsmen had flooded into the Middle Kingdom under the aegis of the Mongols. In 1368 the Ming dynasty drove the alien Mongols out of China, and their Central Asian officials went with them, but the international character of the Yüan left its mark on early Ming China, and for more than sixty years after the founding of the new dynasty the Chinese court carried on some of the most extensive foreign explorations the world had ever seen. The maritime expeditions of the famous eunuch Cheng Ho are well known, but in Central Asia, too, Chinese missions traveled overland to such distant cities as Samarkand, Bukhara, Andkhui, Herat—and beyond to Shiraz and Isfahan in Persia.

The official history of the Ming gives as the reason for these missions to Central Asia the Yung-lo Emperor's desire "that none of the ten thousand countries in distant lands should not be his subject."³ The emperor may in other words have been trying "to bring all the known world within the Chinese tributary scheme of things."⁴ If so, it is interesting, as I shall show farther on, that the Yung-lo Emperor was willing in 1418 to compromise even the very cornerstone of the Chinese conception of world order: his suzerainty in the world. No doubt numerous motives and interests lay behind the costly expeditions to Central Asia: prestige, military intelligence, and the profits of trade. Mixed in with these and other motives, which are still very much open to speculation, was the Ming court's specific interest in certain Central Asian commodities—in particular, horses. In any case, Chinese interest in intercourse with Central Asia was more than matched by Central Asian interest in intercourse with China. ✓

It has long been known in the West that Chinese custom insisted upon an official footing for foreign trade. The Ming generally prevented private individuals from going to Central Asia for commerce,⁵ although outlaw Chinese merchants did carry on some illicit private trade of their own during periods of upheaval (when official missions could not travel freely)⁶ and, one suspects, during times of peace as well. By and large, however, foreign trade seems to have proceeded through the proper channels, that is to say, in accordance with the "tributary scheme of things." Since Ming China, within its own borders, recognized foreign states only as vassals,

Central Asian merchants who wanted to trade inside the Middle Kingdom had to come as part of a diplomatic mission from a vassal state bringing "tribute" to the emperor.

"Tribute" (*kung*) was a vague term that could mean anything given to the Chinese emperor, irrespective of the relationship between the emperor and the giver. *Kung* covered everything from tribute and taxes required on a regular basis from the emperor's confirmed subjects to diplomatic gifts presented by distant rulers who in no way recognized the Chinese emperor's authority. One must always bear in mind in reading Chinese history that gifts received as tribute were not necessarily given as such. It was not in the interest of imperial claims to preserve any nice distinctions.

Rulers of the petty oasis states on Ming China's Central Asian periphery gladly complied with the tributary formalities. Tribute missions were a ✓ lucrative business, and there was always the hope (usually unfounded) that Ming overlordship would carry with it some degree of protection as well. The profits of trade also attracted other, more distant states. Yarkand, for example, served as an entrepôt where, according to the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci, "the caravan of Kabul merchants is ended, and from there a new one is formed for China, the leadership of which caravan the king [of Yarkand] sells at a high price, and he imparts to the leader [of the caravan] a royal authority over all the merchants throughout the whole journey."⁷ Businessmen from Western Turkestan and yet remoter lands were drawn into the trade, and since it was well known that ambassadorial status was the prerequisite for entry into China,⁸ as well as the ticket to Chinese subsidy of the trip, ambassadorial status was readily forthcoming.

✓ The Chinese authorities were happy to be deceived. The emperor's prestige was not enhanced if his ministers exposed the real nature of his "vassals," and the court had surer pick of the merchandise if traders, instead of selling their wares at frontier markets, brought them along to the capital. As a result, counterfeit embassies bearing counterfeit credentials rode back and forth regularly to the Chinese court. Merchants and ministers alike were parties to what could only have been an open secret,⁹ and indeed the trade motives of these embassies could have been no secret at all, since the very "tribute" memorials often specified the gifts wanted in exchange.¹⁰ According to Ricci, "the Chinese themselves (who are by no means ignorant of the deception) delude their king, fawning with devotion, as if truly the whole world paid taxes to the Chinese kingdom, whereas on the contrary tribute is more truly paid to those kingdoms by China."¹¹

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And if Ricci was in any way mistaken, it was only in believing that the emperor himself was not in on the game as well.

The "tribute system" left Central Asian trade in Central Asian hands but kept it under imperial control. Private Chinese merchants had to stay in China, and because the system gave entry only to "vassals" of the empire, Chinese subjects met no foreigners who were not also "subjects" of the realm: no living challenge to the ruler's claims walked the streets of the Middle Kingdom. Foreign envoys returning home glorified China's name abroad (since the system admitted only those foreigners whom the court was prepared to impress on a lavish scale), and the court could adjust tribute intervals to fit its own demand. For Central Asia, relations with China meant trade; for China, the basis of trade was tribute.¹²

Chu Ti and Shāhrukh Bahādur

Sultan Shāhrukh Bahādur was no vassal of the Ming, nor indeed was his father Temür the Lame, "Lord of the Happy Conjunction," but both are enrolled as tributaries in the Ming official history.¹³ These two Central Asian monarchs' relations with Chu Ti of the Ming (the celebrated Yung-lo Emperor) challenge the widespread belief that "whoever wished to enter into relations with China must do so as China's vassal, acknowledging the supremacy of the Chinese emperor and obeying his commands," and that this neo-Confucian dogma ruled out "all possibility of international intercourse on terms of equality."¹⁴

It was in the first place the Hung-wu Emperor Chu Yüan-chang himself, founder of the Ming, who initiated diplomatic relations with Temür.¹⁵ After some time, on October 4, 1394, according to the Ming annals, the Chinese court received from Temür a tribute of two hundred horses and a letter of submission. The letter said all the obsequious things that Chinese rulers liked to hear, acknowledged the Hung-wu Emperor's mandate of Heaven to rule the world, and expressed gratitude that he had facilitated trade with foreign lands.¹⁶ The emperor commended Temür's literary style,¹⁷ but the wrong man certainly received the credit, since there is nothing in the Muslim conqueror's character to make one suppose that Temür would have acquiesced knowingly in any infidel's "mandate of Heaven" to rule the world.¹⁸ Whether a real letter from Temür was "translated" into Chinese by a merchant, or by a Ming official too frightened or too servile to render the original, or whether, as is less likely, the letter is a

total fiction remains unknown, but Temür's "submission" is in all probability an example of how the "tributary scheme of things" transformed reality to fit its own image.

The attempt to put Temür into the role of vassal within the Chinese world order, whoever may have been responsible, could well have cost China her freedom, because in 1395 the Ming emperor sent a return embassy to thank the conqueror for his letter of submission.¹⁹ Previously Temür's relations (that is to say, trade) with King Pig²⁰ of China had been amicable, and the traffic had been profitable enough for Temür's annual "tribute" to have reached 1,000 horses,²¹ but now with the arrival of the Chinese embassy of 1395 the Muslim ruler changed his attitude—infidel China considered him a vassal, and the insult must some day be avenged.²² Temür detained the embassy and in time began gathering military intelligence about China,²³ but meanwhile he had business elsewhere in India and in western Asia.

In 1398 the Hung-wu Emperor died, and in 1402 after a struggle for the throne Chu Ti, the Yung-lo Emperor, succeeded. The new Ming ruler, apparently unaware of Temür's determination to invade China and annihilate the "idolators," sent out a new embassy to ask why he had let seven years go by without paying his annual tribute.²⁴ This embassy was no show of force like the mighty armadas of Cheng Ho which had their way with coastal principalities: it was a normal embassy, at the mercy of the countries through which it passed, accompanied by a Chinese trade caravan of 800 camels laden with merchandise.²⁵

That China regarded Temür's gifts as tribute was now a matter of general knowledge. Scornfully the conqueror promised to deliver the tribute in person, seized the entire caravan of 800 camels, publicly insulted the Chinese emperor and his ambassadors, and even ordered that the latter should be hanged, so that no Chinese might ever dare bring such an embassy again.²⁶ When Temür died in 1405 he was on his way to destroy the Ming. His death ended the campaign, but it was clear that he was no tributary of China.

With the accession of Shāhrukh Bahādur, the "Happy Khāqān" (ruled 1405–1447), the hostility of Sino–Central Asian relations faded away. On July 25, 1407, the detained Chinese embassy of 1395 returned to the Ming court and reported the Muslim conqueror's death.²⁷ On April 29, 1408, Chu Ti sent ambassadors back to Central Asia²⁸ to offer his condolences and, presumably, to promote good relations. When the embassy arrived in Herat with gifts during January of 1409, the Timurid emperor Shāhrukh

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received it warmly²⁹ and sent a return embassy which was received at the Ming court on August 9 of the same year. The Chinese emperor responded with another embassy to the Timurids.³⁰

On March 14 of the following year, 1410, Chu Ti received still another embassy from Herat, which prompted him to dispatch ambassadors to Shāhrukh once again, this time carrying the usual kind of document sent by Chinese emperors to foreign rulers.³¹ In his letter, which arrived during April of 1412,³² Chu Ti proclaimed himself "lord of the realms of the face of the earth"³³ who "makes no distinction between far and near and regards all equally and impartially."³⁴ Using the royal "we," he addressed Shāhrukh in the second person singular and in condescending terms commended him for being a good ruler and for sending an ambassador to do the Chinese emperor homage (*khidmat*), as he claimed Shāhrukh's father Temür had done before him. In concluding, Chu Ti spoke of keeping communications open for the sake of trade and advised Shāhrukh to make peace with his nephew Khalīl Sultān. The only concession, if it can be regarded as such, that the Ming emperor made to the sensibilities of his Muslim correspondent was to ascribe to God the authorship of all things in heaven and earth—Chu Ti did not blush, however, to make the point that it was by God's command³⁵ that he, Chu Ti, was "lord of the realms of the face of the earth."³⁶

Shāhrukh responded in kind to this haughty document. He sent the Ming emperor a letter in Arabic and another in Persian advising Chu Ti to put aside his infidel ways and adopt Islam. He patronized him by naming off a list of other princes who had adopted the religion and reminded him that since "sovereignty and power" (*salṭanat wa dawlat*) are brought about by faith (*īmān*), submission to the will of God (*islām*), and God's favor, he "should live in justice, equity and fairness toward [his] subjects." Shāhrukh called for friendly relations in continuation of "the affection and friendship which existed between [our] fathers," and counseled an open road to commerce, since this would result in "the prosperity of kingdoms and good repute in [this] world and [in the world] to come."³⁷

Shāhrukh's response produced a kind of diplomatic stalemate but did not lead to a break in relations as the similar (and famous) Japanese refusal to recognize Chinese suzerainty had done three decades earlier. Both emperors, Ming and Timurid, moderated their imperious tone and continued to exchange embassies. The official Ming annals (*shih-lu*) of course make no mention of Shāhrukh's patronizing letter and report only that the Ming ambassador returned from Herat and other places on July

23, 1413, with a Timurid embassy which had come to present "tribute."³⁸ The Timurid ambassadors were honored with an imperial feast on July 29,³⁹ and on October 12 they were sent back to Central Asia along with a Ming embassy.⁴⁰ On November 30, 1415, this same Ming embassy returned to the Chinese court with more "tribute"-bearers from the Timurids.⁴¹ The court feasted the Central Asian ambassadors on December 4⁴² and again on December 31⁴³ and sent them back to Central Asia on July 13, 1416, with still another Chinese embassy.⁴⁴ This embassy reached Shāhrukh in the spring of the following year⁴⁵ with a letter from Chu Ti cordially urging that "from both sides [they] should lift the veil of difference and disunity and order the opening of the door of agreement and unity, so that subjects and merchants may come and go at will and the roads may be secure."⁴⁶

Shāhrukh responded with an embassy whose advance party reached the Ming court on January 21, 1418, and is duly recorded in the Ming annals as a mission coming to present "tribute."⁴⁷ The Timurid ambassador, who did not himself arrive until September 19, was entertained by the Board of Rites⁴⁸ and then on the thirtieth of the month was sent back to Central Asia.⁴⁹ With him went another Chinese embassy bearing a letter from the Ming emperor which affords us a rare glimpse of the discrepancy between myth and reality in traditional Chinese foreign relations.

Chu Ti's letter of 1418 to Shāhrukh Bahādur is written as a message to a fellow monarch. The Ming emperor is not guilty of humility, but in addressing his Timurid counterpart he abandons the condescending second person singular, dispenses with the customary imperial claims to world suzerainty, and accepts Shāhrukh's gifts as gifts rather than tribute. At the same time, to keep up appearances in China, Chu Ti's letter also complies with the Chinese practice of honorific elevation, so that the Ming emperor's title at the beginning of the letter extends farther into the margin than Shāhrukh's title of "sultan." This subtle device allows Chu Ti to maintain two postures at once: political equality in Central Asia and world supremacy in China. The letter reads as follows:

The Grand Dāyming Pādshāh sends [this] letter to

Sultan Shāhrukh. We reflect [that] the Lord Most High has created him knowing, wise, and mature [of judgment] so that he may hold the realm of Islam. Because of this, the men of that realm have grown rich. The

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Sultan [is] enlightened, perceptive, knowing, mature, sensible, and greater than all the Muslims, and to the command of the Lord Most High has done homage and obedience, and in His work has been diligent, because it is in keeping with [His]

Heavenly assistance. We formerly sent as envoys *Amīr-i Sarāy Līdā* with his retinue. They reached the

Sultan. According to the rules of etiquette he commanded much pomp and ceremony [for their reception]. Līdā and his retinue have returned and have reported. Everything has become right, clear, and evident to us, and [the Sultan's] envoys, Beg Būqā and the rest, have returned together with Līdā and his retinue. They have brought along for us as gifts (*hadāyā*) a lion, Arabian (Tāzī) horses, leopards (*yūzān*), and other things. To this court they have brought [them] all. We have viewed them all. They have made manifest the sincerity of [the Sultan's] affection. We are extremely grateful. [In] the Western Regions, which are the place of Islam, of the wise men and good men of old, no one has been greater than the

Sultan, and he is well able to give security and comfort to the men of that realm, which is in accordance with the will of

God, may His Glory be exalted! How should the

Lord Most High not be pleased and glad? In manly fashion men have befriended one another. [Our friendship] is heart to heart [reflecting] like a mirror, although there be [such a] distance [between us]. From the [point of] view of friendship it seems that good will and compassion are more precious than anything, but in the spirit of those [virtues] something precious [that is, a gift or two] is also [sent]. Now Līdā and Jāngqwā with their retinue have been specially sent along with the envoys Beg Būqā and the rest to deliver seven falcons (*sūngqūr*) as gifts (*hadāyā*) to the

Sultan: all these falcons we have flown with our own hand. And also gifts of embroidered silk (*kimkhā*) and other things as well have been sent. Although [these] falcons are not [indigenous] to our Chinese realm, nevertheless [people] are continually bringing [them] from the seacoast for us as rarities. Because of this there is no scarcity. In that land of yours they have been difficult to find. They have been sent specially that they may be tokens of [our] gratitude worthy of the Sultan's great generosity. Although [these] things are of no account, since they are nevertheless the [only] means [we have in which to express] our affection, may they be acceptable to the

Sultan. Hereafter the sincerity of [our] affection should increase, and envoys and merchants should constantly come and go, and there should be no interruption, so that men may all enjoy the riches of safety, security, and ease. Surely the Lord Most High will [then] increase [His] goodness and mercy [toward us]. This is what [we] have had to say. Finis.⁵⁰

Needless to say, the text of Chu Ti's letter is not recorded in the Ming annals; still, there can be little doubt about its authenticity. The phraseology of the letter is the odd language of literal translation, and the Timurid chronicler himself remarks upon the curious Chinese practice of honorific elevation. In this letter Chu Ti abandons all pretense that he is Shāhrukh's suzerain and addresses him as a political equal. In so doing, the Ming ruler violates the neo-Confucian myth that as emperor of China he is suzerain of the world.⁵¹

The embassy bearing Chu Ti's letter arrived in Samarkand about August 22, 1419,⁵² and reached Herat in October.⁵³ Shāhrukh soon dismissed the Chinese embassy, and it returned to China by way of Samarkand.⁵⁴ On December 4 a Timurid return embassy left Herat with instructions that one of the envoys, a certain Ghiyāth al-Dīn Naqqāsh, was to keep a detailed record of the embassy's journey.⁵⁵ The embassy record that Ghiyāth al-Dīn kept shows plainly that the Ming emperor's willingness to communicate as an equal at a distance is not to be construed as a symptom of any such fraternal attitude on his own ground in China.

In the early morning of December 14, 1420, while it was still dark,⁵⁶ the Timurid embassy arrived at the gates of Peking and was at length received in audience by the emperor. Ghiyāth al-Dīn's account describes the sumptuous Ming court⁵⁷ and the ambassadors' reception: first, an official read aloud a statement in Chinese to the effect that "from a long distance away, from the presence of his Majesty Shāhrukh and his children, the envoys have come, and [they] have brought gifts (*tabarrukāt*) for the padshah and have come to knock their heads at the foot of the throne." Next, some of the emperor's Muslim officials approached the ambassadors and said, "First bow down and after that put your heads on the floor three times." Accordingly, the ambassadors put down their heads, but, if we are to believe Ghiyāth al-Dīn's account, they "did not let their foreheads reach the floor."⁵⁸ The ambassadors' claim not to have performed the full kotow in formal audience shows that they understood the implications of the act. The Ming ruler was not treating the Timurid emperor as his

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political equal in Peking, regardless of what he may have said in his letter to faraway Herat. What is more, the ambassadors' fear of compromising their sovereign's honor is doubly clear, because on other occasions, when it was simply a question of abasing *themselves* and not their ruler, the ambassadors were quite willing to perform the kotow, however distasteful this Chinese custom may have been to them.⁵⁹

Ghiyāth al-Dīn describes the rest of the audience: the letters from the Timurids were presented to Chu Ti, who asked the ambassadors several questions about their country and about the Turkmen chief Qara Yūsuf. The emperor also expressed an interest in acquiring good horses.⁶⁰ The embassy was feasted on the following day⁶¹ and again three days later,⁶² and on the Chinese New Year (February 2, 1421) the ambassadors were included in the ceremonies officially inaugurating Peking as capital of the Ming empire.⁶³ The embassy was present at court on February 17⁶⁴ and had further audiences with Chu Ti on March 6 and 7.⁶⁵ On the thirteenth, Chu Ti granted special gifts to Ulugh Beg's ambassadors and their ladies (*khātūnān*), perhaps because these envoys had brought better horses than the other Timurid ambassadors.⁶⁶ The embassy also saw the emperor again on March 18,⁶⁷ and April 6⁶⁸ and April 8,⁶⁹ before obtaining leave from the ailing emperor's son in May and departing from the capital.⁷⁰

Chu Ti's relations with Temür and Shāhrukh Bahādur reveal the inconsistency between Ming doctrine and practice and challenge some widely held notions about Chinese foreign relations. Neo-Confucian myth asserted the emperor's world supremacy by the will of Heaven. That is to say, whether he ruled, or reigned, or (as some prefer) gave order to the world, the emperor of China, by the very nature of things, had a moral authority over all mankind. It has been claimed that this Chinese doctrine was not "a dogma . . . of universal dominion,"⁷¹ but we have Chu Ti's own words that as emperor of China he held "the mandate of Heaven to rule both China and foreigners." Chu Ti had launched his fleets to the Western Seas and sent his missions overland to Shiraz and Isfahan, but he had also fostered the examination system based on neo-Confucian orthodoxy and ordered definitive editions of the neo-Confucian scriptures. Later the emperor's desire for world dominion was given as the principal explanation for his grandiose expeditions.⁷²

According to the official myth, foreigners could trade with China only by petition to the Son of Heaven and recognition of his authority. In practice, however, the early Ming court took Chinese commerce to the

foreigners. To say that in Ming times "All who wished to enter into relations with China . . . must acknowledge the suzerainty of the Chinese emperor," or that "Any violation of the elaborate code governing tribute mission[s] and trade was penalized by the breaking of relations," or that such irregularities could be overlooked only "so long as the emperor did not get wind of them"⁷³ is to ignore the early Ming experience with Central Asia. "Irregularities," when they were in the imperial interest, could be and were initiated by the emperor himself. The court not only winked at counterfeit "tribute" embassies and dealt with rulers who, with the court's full knowledge, did not recognize the emperor's authority; it even took the initiative and promoted commerce.⁷⁴ When a foreign ruler would not acquiesce in the language of the Chinese myth, the Chinese emperor could and did abandon his posture of world supremacy to address that ruler on equal terms.

The contrast between Chu Ti's letter of 1410 and his letter of 1418 is striking and inescapable. It is well known that the Manchus later dealt with the encroaching Russians on an equal basis at a time of military emergency, but the letter of 1418 is of even greater institutional interest because it was sent by a Chinese emperor at a time of great Chinese power to a ruler thousands of miles away. In other words, to preserve desirable relations the Ming court was flexible enough to use a double standard, and, except for a few officials in the chancellery and the embassies concerned, the Chinese court and populace were none the wiser. The Ming emperor could suppress his mandate to suit his own convenience so long as his dealings were conducted at a distance and so long as the necessary appearances were preserved in China. Within China's borders such concessions were impossible, and when the Timurid envoys arrived in 1420 they were told to knock their heads upon the floor.

Tribute and Trade: Traditional Relations to 1755

On September 7, 1424, shortly after his accession to the Ming throne, the Yung-lo Emperor's son Chu Kao-chih abolished overland missions "to buy horses" in Central Asia.⁷⁵ To be sure, he died after reigning less than a year, and his successors did occasionally send ambassadors abroad,⁷⁶ but in time the substance of Chu Kao-chih's policy prevailed and the Ming court gradually gave up its active international role.

From Chu Kao-chih to the end of the dynasty, China's relations with

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Central Asia remained essentially the "tributary" relations that have come to be regarded as traditional. China let Central Asian traders come to her.⁷⁷ Eventually the court even began to accept "tribute" less readily than it had before. Horses, which had been the most important concrete item of Chinese interest in the Western Regions,⁷⁸ and also jade and other luxury goods, had to be balanced against the terrible expense of the "tribute" missions and the trouble they caused.⁷⁹ "Rare birds and strange beasts" were curiosities that had no real use⁸⁰ and, although emperors liked to receive such exotic presents, the literati, upholders of Confucian values, disapproved.⁸¹ Too much interest in frivolous luxuries on the part of the emperor was unseemly, and when in 1487 a mission from Samarkand asked to ship a lion to the court by sea the emperor refused the request so that neighboring countries would not laugh at China.⁸²

As border threats grew more dangerous from the direction of Mongolia, as Ming vitality weakened, and as the neo-Confucian revival took hold in official thinking, trade grew less respectable in official eyes and came to be regarded largely as a concession that the court could use to buy peace with the Mongols.⁸³ Accordingly, during the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries Central Asian merchants carried on much of their commerce via Mongolian "tributary" trade. Mongolian chieftains either sold the leadership of their "tribute" missions to Central Asian merchants outright or included them in their embassies to Peking.⁸⁴

The wider geographical aspirations which Chu Yüan-chang and Chu Ti had inherited from the Mongolian empire had proved impracticable, and the Ming emperors now began to fulfill their mandate more passively. More and more, China stood aloof, disdained trade, and viewed the acceptance of Central Asian tribute as a concession; nevertheless, it would be a distortion to regard the early Ming explorations simply as the events of an isolated episode. That the Ming tried to draw the world closer during the early years of the dynasty and not afterward reflects the Ming's early strength and its later weakness. It does not reflect a change of doctrine or an abdication of the emperor's world supremacy. The early initiative and the later withdrawal occurred within the context of the same institutions and imperial claims. The foreign expeditions and diplomatic concessions of the Hung-wu and Yung-lo periods represent Ming values in a period of strength, while the antiforeignism and anticommercialism of the later Ming are their expression in a period of weakness.

In its declining years the Ming court, principally alert to dangers from Mongolia, focused its attention on developments north of the Great Wall

and was not much concerned with the "Western Regions." Central Asia likewise remained little concerned with China, and by the end of the Ming dynasty Central Asians saw China mostly as a distant empire, a market partly dependent on Central Asian commerce,⁸⁵ and an enormous body of heathen whom Muslims would some day convert.⁸⁶ Central Asians considered China's culture developed but inferior to their own, and they found the Chinese ignorant of the world.⁸⁷ China's emperor was a great potentate, but seen from Central Asia he was not necessarily foremost among such figures as the Crimean, Russian, Indian Moghul, and Ottoman rulers.⁸⁸ Many Central Asians believed the emperor of China to be a Muslim in private life; some even thought him a Christian.⁸⁹

By the time of the Manchu invasion of China in 1644 and the establishment of the Manchu Ch'ing empire, the Timurid and Moghul⁹⁰ realms of Central Asia had disintegrated into numerous smaller kingdoms and principalities. Because most of Central Asia was cut off from China by mountains, deserts, and considerable distance, that region seemed to present no immediate threat to China's security, and from 1646, when Turfan established "tributary" relations with the new dynasty,⁹¹ to 1696, when Hami formally submitted to the K'ang-hsi Emperor,⁹² Ch'ing relations with Central Asia remained essentially commercial. During this time, however, with the rise of the Oyrat (or Kalmuk) empire in Zungharia, the Ch'ing court gradually began to regard Central Asia as a potential source of danger, especially after the Oyrat ruler Galdan invaded Eastern Turkestan in the late 1670's and incorporated it into the Oyrat empire.⁹³

Eastern Turkestan was by now divided among a profusion of city-states.⁹⁴ The inhabitants of these city-states spoke closely related Turkic languages and shared a common Islamic culture and sedentary mode of life, but they had no sense of belonging to a single nationality, and their cities were not united by any common political structure other than that provided by the Oyrat conquest. The southwestern cities, known variously as Kashgaria, or the Six, Seven, or Eight Cities,⁹⁵ were largely a cultural extension of Western Turkestan, whereas the northeastern cities of Uighuristan,⁹⁶ because of their small size, mixed ethnological composition,⁹⁷ and proximity to China, had long been part of the Chinese orbit. For Kashgarians; Turfan (the center of Uighuristan) was *Gharibāna* Turfan, a city "of foreigners."⁹⁸

In 1688 the Oyrat invaded Outer Mongolia, and by 1690 they were openly at war with the Ch'ing. Six years later the Manchu forces succeeded

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in driving the Oyrad out of Mongolia, but the fighting recommenced in 1715, and it took another forty years of intermittent warfare for the Manchu forces to eliminate the Oyrad menace. During this time Ch'ing relations with Central Asia proper (Eastern and Western Turkestan) were restricted to the traditional blend of "tribute" and trade, with merchants sometimes coming directly from Central Asia and sometimes coming as part of Oyrad "tribute" embassies.

The Manchus and the Khojas: China Takes a Piece of Central Asia

When the Ch'ing army finally entered the Oyrad capital in 1755, among the prisoners who fell into their hands were two brothers of a family of khojas whom the Oyrad had held as hostages. These khojas belonged to a dynasty of Muslim holy men whom the inhabitants of Kashgaria regarded as their legitimate rulers. The khojas had all the symbols of legitimation that one could have wanted in the Central Asia of that time. They claimed genealogical descent from Muḥammad, religious succession as heads of a sufi order that went back to the Prophet, and some of them claimed genealogical descent from the imperial house of Chinggis Khan.⁹⁹ The Oyrad had held the khojas as hostages in order to ensure Kashgaria's obedience, and now, in 1755, with the defeat of the Oyrad, the two khoja brothers were captured by the Ch'ing. From the Ch'ing point of view, their capture made them vassals of the emperor and made a vassal state of their domain, Kashgaria. It was on this understanding that the Manchus sent the so-called Elder Khoja back to govern Kashgaria, while they continued to hold the Younger Khoja as a hostage.

In the spring of 1756 the ambitious Younger Khoja escaped and joined his brother in Kashgaria. In the autumn of that year, when the Manchus sent an envoy to establish the tribute that the "vassal" khojas would have to pay, the two brothers did not respond, and in the spring of 1757, when the Ch'ing court sent a mission to impose its demands, the khojas, claiming their independence, massacred the mission.¹⁰⁰ To the Manchus, who were at the height of their military power, rebellion from a vassal was intolerable, and if they allowed the offense to go unpunished it might encourage rebellion in other quarters. Accordingly, on February 10, 1758, the Ch'ien-lung Emperor dispatched an army against the khojas in Kashgaria,¹⁰¹ and on December 12 of the following year he received formal notification that his army had destroyed them.¹⁰² In this way the Ch'ing empire encum-

Asian state was simply a Manchu vassal. Outwardly, Kokandian ambassadors had been received in Peking as tribute-bearers, but when the emperor had addressed the ambassadors through his Turki interpreters he had referred to the Kokandian ruler as "my son,"¹¹¹ a phrase which (as the Manchus well knew) was altogether different in Inner Asia from "my subject."¹¹² The emperor's use of the phrase "my son" converted the humbling court ritual from an act of submission into just another Chinese custom and in so doing facilitated relations with Kokand, but the price the emperor had paid was a covert renunciation of his suzerain claims.

By the 1820's Kokand, straddling the caravan route, clearly dominated Kashgaria's Russian and Central Asian trade. In Kashgaria itself, Kokandian merchants had acquired a growing influence by intermarriage and the purchase of Kashgarian lands,¹¹³ and throughout Jahāngīr Khoja's rebellion Kokand had given open aid to the khoja forces. Now, with Jahāngīr's defeat, the Ch'ing court resolved to punish the Kokandian government, which still harbored other khojas and still threatened the peace in Kashgaria.

Not feeling strong enough to humble the khanate with an armed invasion, the Ch'ing authorities arrested all Kokandian merchants in Eastern Turkestan, sealed the Kashgarian border to Kokandian commerce, and made special trade arrangements with other Central Asian countries so as to bypass Kokand altogether.¹¹⁴ The results of this stratagem were not long in coming, but they were different from what the Ch'ing court had expected. The stoppage of trade deprived Kokand of its profits and tax revenues, but the khanate, now at the height of its power, did not come to terms. Instead, seeing the weakness of the Ch'ing position in Kashgaria, Kokand declared a Muslim holy war in the name of the khojas and in the early autumn of 1830 invaded Kashgaria with an army of about 40,000 men.¹¹⁵ Roughly three months later, laden with booty, the Kokandian forces voluntarily withdrew, but by then it was clear that Kashgaria's peace was no longer within Ch'ing control.

Having failed with punishments, the Manchus now tried to buy the Kokandian government, and in 1832 the court offered Kokand a resumption of trade, the right to station political agents in Kashgaria, political and administrative control over all foreigners in Kashgaria, and receipt of all duties that might be collected in Kashgaria from Kokandian merchants. In return Kokand was supposed to respect the peace and keep the khojas out of Eastern Turkestan.¹¹⁶ Kokand agreed but, conscious of its ability to dictate terms, soon pressed the Ch'ing for the right to tax all foreign mer-

chants in Kashgaria as well. Because such a concession meant a virtual Kokandian monopoly of Kashgaria's trade, the Manchus refused, only to have Kokand raid the Kashgarian borderlands regularly for the next five years¹¹⁷ and impose its monopoly anyway.

Until 1864 the Manchu empire tried to keep order in Eastern Turkestan at the price of its Central Asian trade. At first Kokand found its monopoly too profitable to risk and kept the khojas confined, giving the Ch'ing government an opportunity to concentrate on a program of land reclamation, while it tried at the same time to incorporate Kashgaria more fully into China by settling Chinese colonists on Kashgarian lands.¹¹⁸ After about a decade, however, Kokand began to take further advantage of the Ch'ing government's precarious hold over Kashgaria, and in 1847, 1855, 1857, and 1862, khoja forces entered Kashgaria from Kokand to take booty and stir up Kashgarian revolt.¹¹⁹ Each time, the Ch'ing army found the strength to drive them out again, but the army was not strong enough to follow the khojas across the mountains and destroy their base or to punish Kokand, their protector. As a result, the Manchus felt constrained to perpetuate Kokandian trade rights after each khoja attack in the futile hope that Kokand would eventually find stability to its commercial advantage.

The troubled state of peace lasted until 1862, when the great Tungan (Chinese Muslim) rebellion flared up in Shensi and Kansu and cut Kashgaria off from Ch'ing control for a period of about twelve years.¹²⁰ While the Tungans were challenging the Manchu emperor's authority in northwest China, in Eastern Turkestan a Kokandian adventurer and khoja partisan named Ya'qūb Beg reconquered Kashgaria for Islam and established an independent emirate. With the dynasty's prestige at stake, the Ch'ing government outwardly assumed an uncompromising posture, but, as in the case of the Ming relations with Shāhrukh Bahādur and the Ch'ing court's own relations with Kokand, the government was free unofficially to follow the dictates of the situation. Accordingly, the Manchus established contact with Ya'qūb Beg's "rebel" regime. The full extent of this contact is unknown, but the memoirs of a contemporary Greek traveler to Eastern Turkestan reveal that the Ch'ing at least sent an embassy to the Kokandian "rebel" in 1871 and that the Ch'ing authorities in Hami honored a passport that the outlaw emir had issued.¹²¹

Not until 1876 did the Ch'ing forces extinguish the Tungan rebellion, and by the time they had managed to destroy Ya'qūb Beg and recover Kashgaria two years later, in 1878, Central Asia had a very different face: the expanding Russian empire had annexed Kokand and was now swiftly