

Chinese Written Sources of The Qing Era and Their Importance for The Study of The History of Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

The article describes some Chinese written sources of the Qing era (1644-1911), which significantly supplement and expand the general information about the territories and peoples of China during the reign of the Manchu dynasty. Information about the authors of the works and the structure of written sources is provided. For example, "Qingdai Tongshi" (清代通史, The general History of the Qing Dynasty) Xiao Yishan describes the events of the entire Qing era. Information about the peoples of Central Asia is contained in the second book in the second section, devoted to the reign of Qianlong. The fundamental work, which belongs to the category of official sources "Qing Shilu" (清实录, True records of the Qing Dynasty), is a collection of chronologically arranged facts and official documents. Since the volume of the essay is huge, we are interested in extracts from this source containing materials on Xinjiang. "Qing Shilu" by Xinjiang Ziliao Jilu" (清实录新疆资料辑录, Collection of materials on Xinjiang from "Qing Shilu") The 2016 edition consists of 8 volumes, totaling 4,596 pages. Information about Kazakhs and Buruts (Kyrgyz) is contained in chapter two. Among the writings of a private nature, we note "Siyu shuidao ji" (a description of the waterways of the Western Region) Xu Song (1781-1848), a fundamental work on the historical geography of the Western Region of the Qing period.

All of these works have yet to be thoroughly investigated, as the sources contain little-studied information about the peoples and historical geography of Central Asia, on the socio-political and economic situation in Central Asia during the Qing era.

Keywords: Western lands, Central Asia, Xiyu, Xinjiang, Qing, Qianlong, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Kokand, Bukhara.

INTRODUCTION

There are many types of Chinese sources, which differ in the method of presenting the material, the subject matter, and the placement of emphasis.

Among the most famous are, first of all, dynastic chronicles, describing the events that took place during the reign of the ruling dynasties in China; the shilu series (true records), offering us more

detailed information about the affairs of the reign of individual emperors; qiju zhu (diaries), which recorded the daily deeds of the emperors; sheng xun (sacred instructions), which collected fragments of the emperors' decrees; fangliue (descriptions of wars), fangzhi (historical and geographical descriptions), etc.

No other period in Chinese imperial history has generated such heated debate and controversy as the Qing period (1644-1911). First of all, this is due to the fact that the Qing (清) era was a turning point, when the most developed countries of the world were freed from the shackles of the Middle Ages, and China, as a result of the "opium wars", was forcibly opened to the world and turned into a semi-colony. Despite the changes of dynasties, traditional Chinese historiography was not interrupted, and the historiographic activity of the Manchu authorities began already with the reign of Abahai.

Speaking about the study of Qing history in China, we note that at the end of the 20th century, the special significance of studying Qing history was emphasized. Since the end of the 1970s, institutions have been created that specialize in the development of various problems of the Qing period, and at the present stage, a network of such institutions is actively functioning. The most important are the Qing Dynasty History Research Institute (清史研究, Qingshi yanjiusuo) at the Renmin University of China in Beijing (中國人民大學, Zhongguo renmin daxue), the First Historical Archives of China (中國第一歷史檔案庫, Zhongguo diyi lishi dan'anguan) in Beijing, and the Qing Dynasty History Section (清史研究室, Qingshi yanjiushushi) at the Institute of History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. There are also a large number of other specialized institutions and quite a few research institutes whose staff are engaged in the study of various aspects of Qing history. Thanks to them, the work of compiling the 10-volume "Compendium of the Qing Dynasty" (清代通史, Qingdai tongshi) was completed, as well as the editing and republication of written works of the Qing era.

We have at our disposal the work "Qingdai tongshi" (清代通史, General History of the Qing Dynasty) by Xiao Yishan (蕭一山), which describes the 300-year history of the Qing, starting from the Golden Horde to the late Qing period.

The first chapter of this work was published in 1923 by the Shangwu Yinshuguan (商務印書館出

版) publishing house, and subsequent chapters were published the following year. The text of the entire work consisted of over 4,000,000 characters. The work was published in 1963 by the Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan (台灣商務印書館出版社) publishing house. In 1980, the Taiwan Shangwu Yinshuguan (台灣商務印書館) publishing house published the fifth edition of the revised version of the work, which received quite high praise from researchers.

The collection itself, Qingdai tongshi 清代通史 (General History of the Qing Dynasty), consists of three books – (上, 中, 下), which contain 5 volumes (冊), including appendices (附). The first book (上) consists of the first volume (冊), including 33 sections (章) on 1113 pages. The second book (中) contains the second volume (冊) and consists of 20 sections on 1024 pages. The third book (下) begins with a description of the Taiping Rebellion and consists of the third and fourth volumes (冊) on 2791 pages, divided into 42 sections. The fourth book includes the fifth volume (冊) and consists of appendices in the form of tables.

Materials on the history of the peoples of Central Asia are contained in the second book (中) in the second section, dedicated to the reign of Qianlong. The first part of the section is dedicated to the Torguts. Information on the Kazakhs is contained in the second part of the section, on the Buruts in the third part, on Kokand in the fourth part, then there is information on Afghanistan, Badakhshan and other countries and territories.

Another fundamental work on the history of the Qing era is the Qing shilu (清实录, True Records of the Qing Dynasty). The full title is 大清历朝实录 (True Records of the Dynasties of the Great Qing), historical annals of historical works of the annalistic (chronological) genre.

The "True Records" are considered one of the most stable components of Chinese state historiography. Since their text was a collection of chronologically arranged facts and official documents, authorial additions were not allowed.

They represent a collection of texts of decrees, orders and various orders of the emperor; this is a detailed (sometimes daily) chronicle of events to which, one way or another, the imperial court and administrative bodies responded, therefore they contain information on almost any issue of political history of the Qing period that interests the researcher.

The chronicle was compiled separately for the

reign of each emperor. This work included reports from officials on the situation in individual regions and countries outside of Qing China, messages and letters from local rulers, records of their activities and the reaction of the Ming court to various events in the regions.

The value of this source is that it was created on the basis of daily records kept at the Qing court about all events of political and court life, and also that it was intended for a rather narrow circle of readers, therefore *shilu* (true records) present events more frankly than the published official histories.

The work is characterized by many *juan* (卷, chapters) of "Qing *shilu*", strict composition and the most important historical material, covering various areas of the Qing government. The volume of "true records" of each emperor is different, the records of events and the structure are different in many ways, but the main thing is that they touch upon politics, economics, culture, the army, foreign relations, but also natural phenomena and many other things. For example, the "true records" of Emperor Qianlong (乾隆) are 1500 *juan* (chapters).

"The Qing *Shilu*" was copied in five copies in each of three languages – Chinese, Manchu and Mongolian – and was kept separately in the Beijing Imperial Archives Huangshicheng (皇史宬) of the Ming and Qing dynasties, in the Qianqinggong Chamber (one of the three main halls of the Inner Chambers (Neiting) of the Forbidden City, Beijing), the imperial state repository of "true records" Neigeshiluku (内阁实录库), the State Committee for Compiling Official (Dynastic) History, and the book depository of the Manchu Emperor's palace in Shenyang Shengjing Huanggong (盛京皇宫).

During the period of Manchukuo in China, in 1934-1936, the joint-stock company, the Dongbei datsan chuban (东京大藏出版) publishing house, printed 1,200 copies based on the Shenyang copy, called 伪满本 (*wei manben* - not a real book of the Manchus).

During the Qing period, the "true records" were not published, but were only copied several times and kept at the court in the capital and Shengjing (盛京 Mukden).

In the "true records" from Emperor Taizu (太祖) to Emperor Muzong (穆宗), every 5th set is written in Manchu and Chinese, and every 4th set is written in Mongolian. According to established custom, the fifth set in Chinese was decorated and had a large

and small format, according to which it was called: *Da hongling ben* (大红绫本, Large book in [binding from] red patterned silk), *Xiao hongling ben* (小红绫本, Small book in [binding from] red patterned silk), *Xiao huangling ben* (小黄绫本, Small book in [binding from] yellow patterned silk).

The copy of the Qing *Shilu* for the royal use was lavishly decorated. The designers paid great attention to the material used to decorate the cover and case of the book. Dragons and phoenixes in the clouds were embroidered on high-quality patterned red and yellow silk, the outside of the book was wrapped in a piece of bright yellow cloth with golden dragons and tied with a purple cord with white *jindai* flowers (白花锦带).

Each of the five copies of the "*shilu*" was kept separately and had its own purpose. The Big Book in a red silk cover was delivered to the emperor's private chambers in the Qianqinggong Palace (乾清宫), it was considered the main one. Two smaller books in red and yellow were kept in the State Chancellery. The Small Book in a red silk cover was looked through daily by the emperor himself, and the book in a yellow silk cover was a working copy, it could be used by officials and court historiographers.

In 1986, the Chinese publishing house Zhonghua Shuju (中华书局), based on all these copies and other publications, was able to release a relatively complete lithographic edition of Qing *Shilu* (清实录) from 60 volumes of *ce* (册).

In the first lithographic edition, the entire work had a short list and a general index for all volumes, each volume had its own table of contents, in addition, a line was added in the center explaining the era of the emperor, years, and the number of *juan* (chapters) in the volume. At numerous requests from researchers, in the same year of 1986, a reprint of the lithographic edition of "清实录" was carried out, still consisting of 60 volumes, but the explanation was moved to the outside of the book, and the page numbers were made continuous throughout the entire work.

There were several photolithographic editions of the Qing *Shilu*, the most successful of which were made by Zhonghua Shuju Publishing House (中华书局) based on the original copies stored in the First Historical Archives of China (中国第一历史档案馆), the Library of the Palace Museum (故宫博物院图书馆), and the Library of Peking University (北京大学图书馆).

Due to the large volume of the Qing Shilu, Chinese historians have done a great deal of work to compile a collection of extracts from the "True Records" on Xinjiang.

The collection of "Qing shilu" Xinjiang ziliao ziluo" (清实录新疆资料辑录, Collection of materials on Xinjiang from "Qing shilu") of the 2016 edition consists of 8 volumes, with a total volume of 4596 pages. The work consists of a preface by the publishers and editors, and eight juan (chapters). Information about the Kazakhs and Buruts (Kyrgyz) is contained in the second chapter. Appendix: Archives of records on the return of the Torguts (Kalmyks) to the east in the Manchu language. The highest decrees on the Torguts of three Qing emperors - Kangxi, Yongzheng, Qianlong.

Yet, this most valuable source has its shortcomings. Firstly, many of the documents included in it are given with some abbreviations, sometimes approaching a retelling. Secondly, and this is the main thing, the Qing "True Records" were compiled by specially appointed commissions of court dignitaries and historians after the death of the monarch whose reign was covered by this section of the chronicle. Therefore, this chronicle reflected the official point of view on the events that took place and took into account the interests of current politics, i.e. the monarch ruling at the moment.

Diplomats and officials sent to Western countries by order of the Qing government made a great contribution to the study of the historical geography of the territories to the west of China Proper. The works they wrote about the lands they visited were not considered official, but sometimes their value was so great that their information was used by government agencies. For example, information from the work of the famous diplomat of the Ming (明) era Chen Cheng "Xiyu fanguozhi" (陈诚. 西域藩国志) was almost completely included in the dynastic chronicle "Ming shi" (明史 "History [of the Ming Dynasty]").

Among the researchers of the historical geography of the Western Territory (Xiyu) in the Qing era, there was a whole group of former officials (Lin Zexu (林则徐), Xu Song (徐松), Ji Xiaolan (纪晓岚), Hong Liangji (洪亮吉), Qi Yunshi (祁韵士), etc.), exiled by the Qing government to Xinjiang, the so-called "exiled criminals" and "worthless elements." These exiled people, who had stumbled and committed crimes of varying degrees of severity, and sometimes simply received punishments on

slander, were officials who held fairly high positions, scientists and noble persons for most of their lives. Among them were many innocent people who had not committed crimes, who suffered from an unfair accusation and, as a result, were exiled to the western outskirts of the empire. Not only did they often hold high positions, but they also had a broad outlook, a fairly high level of education and culture.

As a result, they were demoted and exiled to the West. Not resigned to their fate, they put all their strength and energy into exploring new lands for them, despite the hardships and deprivations that accompanied them. It must be said that local officials, governors-general, in most cases treated them with respect and care, because of their past merits. A large number of research travel notes about the roads of the Western Territory of that time were a good illustration of how people who had practically lost everything, plunged headlong into new experiences and boldly went to meet the sometimes dangerous trials that accompanied them when exploring previously unknown lands.

Xu Song (1781-1848), the author of the seminal work "Xiyu Shuidao Ji" (西域水道记, Description of the Waterways of the Western Frontier), was a true explorer of the historical geography of the Western Frontier during the Qing period.

Xu Song's career grew rapidly, and he wielded enormous power as an official in charge of examinations in various prefectures and departments, thus influencing the future and fate of countless children and students. It was at this time that his fate took a sharp turn. Xu Song was accused of a number of crimes and exiled to the West, to Xinjiang.

Among the "crimes" Xu Song was accused of were, on the one hand, disorderly conduct and violation of court rules and regulations, and, on the other hand, indiscriminate charges of running schools and publishing and selling his works to students to make money. All of these were important reasons why he eventually lost everything, was dismissed, and exiled to Xinjiang. In the 17th year (1812) of the reign of the Jiaqing Emperor (嘉庆, 1796-1821), he was removed from office and exiled to Ili in Xinjiang.

After Xu Song was exiled to Ili in 1812, he had absolutely nothing to do. He no longer had an official status, he was light, and he had no hope of furthering his career. Nevertheless, he was neither discouraged nor depressed. On the contrary, with unprecedented energy and enthusiasm, he

devoted himself to exploring the Western Regions (Xiyu) and concentrated on studying the history of the borderlands. He devoted himself to studying the history of Xinjiang and even, with a touch of irony, named the garrison where he was stationed "Old Lotus Pavilion" (Lao furongguan, 老芙蓉馆).

Over the next few years, Xu Song traveled among the high mountains and glaciers of the Tian Shan, the desert sands of the Gobi, rivers and lakes, and rural grasslands, exploring and conducting repeated surveys of the water systems of Xinjiang, which resulted in the important work *Xiyu Shueidao Ji*. The work consists of five chapters (juan) with detailed maps of Xu Song's descriptions of the waterways. To describe them, it was necessary to study the sources of the rivers. The rivers often originated from glaciers that were impassable even for horses. One can only imagine the risks Xu Song took in climbing them himself.

During his long 9 years in Xinjiang, Xu Song personally visited every place of interest to him, the farthest of which was the area of Lake Balkhash (Ba'erhashi hu 巴尔喀什湖). Having covered 13,000 li, he explored mountain rivers, rivers flowing through deserts and oases, describing in detail all the parameters of large and small rivers and lakes, and wrote everything down on paper.

Having covered a vast area, he carefully studied a large number of documentary sources. Xu Song's work is a detailed, systematic description of the waterways in Xinjiang at that time.

In addition, the roads, historical sites, city ruins, manufactured products, and ethnic distribution of the areas through which the waterways passed are described in detail. During the exploration of the waterways, Xu Song described the traces of cultural monuments, believing that all of them were closely related to the fate of the waterways and rivers.

Lakes Balkhash, Issyk-Kul, Ala and Jaisan, which were included in the "*Xiyu Shueidao Ji*", were at that time internal lakes of the Qing Empire and the western border of China passed along the northern shore of Lake Balkhash. Later, according to the treaties of the Qing government with Tsarist Russia ("中俄北京条约" "Sino-Russian Beijing Treaty" and "中俄伊犁条约" "Sino-Russian Ili Treaty"), these four large lake areas were transferred to Russia.

During the expedition to Lake Lop Nor (罗不泊), Xu Song recorded that the lake shore was "sandy... and overgrown with trees..." The Lobu (罗布)

people who live here "do not eat grain, use fish for food, weave wild hemp as clothing, take goose feathers as fur, and use... wings as bedding. This is the earliest mention of the existence of the Lobu people.

After many years of hard work, he finally completed the famous historical and geographical work *Xiyu Shueidao Ji* a year before he left Xinjiang (1819). It had been nine years since he was exiled to the Western Regions in 1812.

It should be noted that the work of the Manchu official Xu Song "*Xiyu shudao ji*" (西域水道记, Description of the Waterways of the Western Territory) has yet to be thoroughly studied, since the source contains unknown and little-studied information on the historical geography of Central Asia, as well as detailed data not only on the water system of Xinjiang in the Qing era, but also information on the historical monuments of the region, on the peoples who inhabited the territory he explored, as well as their occupation.

Thus, it should be noted that Chinese written sources of the Qing era stand out both in the volume of available information and in their significance, and they still need to be thoroughly studied to identify new data on the history of Central Asia.

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