

The Afghan Mission to the Qing (1762–63): The Qianlong Emperor's Edict to Ahmad Shah

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INTRODUCTION

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Qing dynasty conquered the areas to the north and south of the Tianshan 天山 Mountains and acquired “Xinjiang” 新疆 (New Dominion). During this process, the Qing came into contact with various Central Asian powers and established relations with each of them. At the same time, the emergence of the powerful Qing dynasty, which had destroyed the Junghars and caused the deaths of the Afaqi brothers (Burhaniddin and Khwaja Jahan) of the Kashgar Khwajas (*Makhdūmzāda*), heightened the wariness of Central Asian powers. As has been pointed out by Valikhanov, the rulers of Khoqand, the Kazakhs, Khojand, and so on sought support from Ahmad Shah Durrani (r. 1747–72) to counter the “infidel” Qing dynasty, leading to the emergence of a Muslim “alliance” extending across Central Asia to Afghanistan, and even to calls for a “holy war” (*jihād*) against the Qing (Valikhanov 1985: 136–137, 322–324). However, moves to form an “alliance” and calls for a “holy war,” which intensified in 1763–64, cannot be taken at face value, for a background factor was a struggle for dominance among various powers under the pretext of opposing the Qing (Onuma et al. 2014: 391–404; Onuma 2014: 206–211).

When considering this complex situation, the presence of Ahmad Shah is worth noting. Ahmad Shah, who founded the Durrani dynasty, also advanced into northwest India and defeated the Maratha Confederacy in January 1761 in the Third Battle of Panipat. Information about Ahmad Shah's invasion of northwest India (Hindustan) was conveyed to the Qing authorities through merchants from Ladakh and Kashmir arriving in Yarkand (Mosca 2013: 81). It was in such circumstances that a mission from Ahmad Shah arrived in 1762 with a letter written in Persian and addressed to the Qianlong 乾隆 emperor (r. 1736–95) (hereafter: Ahmad Shah's letter), in response to which an imperial edict (hereafter: Qianlong's edict) was issued.

Records from the Durrani dynasty regarding the mission to the Qing are, at the

present stage, limited to the chief envoy's name,¹⁾ and an examination of the mission must rely on Russian and Qing sources. One such source is the information brought by an envoy of Nurali Khan of the Small-Jüz Kazakhs, who entered Beijing together with the Afghan mission, and reported to the Russian authorities in 1764 (MOTsA 2: 179–182; TsK 2: 47–49), and because it includes a statement by the Afghan mission, it has attracted attention for some time (e.g., Noda 2011: 170–172). Today, the original Turkic version of this report (ENK 2: 601–607) is also available (hereafter: “Statement”). Meanwhile, Li Xiao (2013) and Eijk and Timur (2023) have made use of Qing archives to describe in detail the reception of the Afghan mission at the Qing court, including the envoy's refusal to kowtow to the emperor.²⁾ However, there exist other historical sources that have not yet been utilized in prior research, one such source being the full text of Qianlong's aforementioned edict.

Unfortunately, Ahmad Shah's original letter and its translation produced by the Qing have not been found or have not been made public. In contrast, excerpts of the Manchu version of Qianlong's edict are included in the JB-S (20: 13a–18a), while excerpts of the Chinese version are included in the PZF-X (20: 6a–8b) and GZSL (678: 15a–17a), and these also include references to the Battle of Panipat (Mosca 2013: 82–83; Eijk & Timur 2023: 717). Recently, it came to light that a copy of the full Manchu text of Qianlong's edict is preserved among the *Junjichu Manwen shang-yu dang* (JMSD) in the First Historical Archives of China.³⁾ The aim of this article is to present a ~~transcription and~~ translation of this Manchu text and to shed light on the process whereby Ahmad Shah's letter was translated and Qianlong's edict was prepared. Furthermore, the emergence of the full text of Qianlong's edict should also deepen our understanding of Ahmad Shah's letter, which has either not been discovered or not been made public.

I. THE MOTIVE FOR DISPATCHING A MISSION AND THE AIM OF THE NEGOTIATIONS

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the Mughal empire in India experienced a significant decline. In contrast, the Maratha Confederacy, formed around the king-

1) See note 4. Elphinstone, the British ambassador who visited Kabul in 1808, states that Ahmad Shah ordered the envoy sent to the Qing to write an account of his journey (Elphinstone 1815: 555), but this account has not been discovered.

2) Newby (2005: 36n50) first pointed out that the Afghan envoy had refused to kowtow.

3) I became aware of the existence of this document when Dawood Azami, a researcher who also works for the BBC, obtained a digital image from the First Historical Archives of China (Doc. no. 03-18-009-000031-0003: 74–81) and asked me to translate it into English. He also readily consented to my writing of this article, and I wish to take this opportunity to thank him.

dom of Maratha in the western Deccan, expanded its influence as far as northern India. Some factions within the Mughal court sought support from Ahmad Shah, but this backfired, leading to the occupation and plundering of Delhi in 1757. After the withdrawal of the Afghan army, Delhi was captured by the Marathas, but Ahmad Shah reoccupied it in late 1759, whereupon Balaji Bajirao (in office 1740–61), the *peshwa* (“prime minister”) of Maratha and leader of the Maratha Confederacy, dispatched a large army and occupied Delhi in August 1760. On November 1 of the same year, the two armies confronted each other at Panipat, north of Delhi, and the decisive battle on January 14, 1761, resulted in a victory for the Afghan army (Sarkar 1934: 82–372; Husain 1994: 92–107).

Ahmad Shah, having withdrawn in March of the same year and returned in triumph to his homeland, sent a mission to the Qing around this time (Elphinstone 1815: 555). His motives for doing so are unclear, but it is possible that it was not done of his own accord. Khwaja Mir Khan,⁴ who led the Afghan mission, spoke as follows to an envoy of the Small-Jüz Kazakhs. Previously, a Qing envoy named Jangjūng, whom the Qing emperor had wanted to send to Ahmad Shah, had arrived in Badakhshan with a letter from the Qing emperor addressed to Ahmad Shah, which he entrusted to Sultan Shah, the local ruler, and then returned to China. According to this letter, “The entire region of Chin and Machin⁵ belongs to us. In addition, Kashgar, Yarkand, Andijan, Khoqand, and all the Kazakhs [are subject] to me, and Ahmad Shah cannot come to these territories.” Enraged, Ahmad Shah sent Khwaja Mir Khan with one thousand men and fifty elephants to Badakhshan, from where Khwaja Mir Khan set out with fifty men for the Qing (ENK 2: 601–602; MOTsA 2: 180; TsK 2: 47–48). Since Jangjūng is a transliteration of *jiangjun* 將軍 (“general”), it is to be surmised that the above refers to an incident in the second half of 1759 when Qing forces arrived in Badakhshan in pursuit of the Khwaja brothers. However, we cannot confirm any evidence that a letter from the Qianlong emperor to Ahmad Shah had been prepared at this stage. One possibility is that a Qing general prepared a letter on his own initiative and sent it, claiming it to be a letter from the emperor. In any case, if the above statement is correct, it would mean that first the Qing attempted to make

4) According to Dawood Azami, in the *Shāhnāmāh-i Ahmādī* (British Library, Add. 26,285: f. 364a), a historical poem about Ahmad Shah’s achievements, the envoy’s name is given as “Khwāja Mīr Khān Kābulī.” In addition, the ENK (2: 601) has “Qōja Mīr Khān.” Meanwhile, after the arrival of the mission, Qing sources in Manchu initially spelt his name “Hojo Mirhan,” but this gradually changed to the similar-looking “Hojo Mir(a)ha,” and in Chinese-language sources his name is given as “Hezhuo Mi’erha” 和卓密爾哈, which corresponds to the latter form.

5) “Chin” refers loosely to northern China and “Machin” to southern China, and so “Chin and Machin” can be understood to mean “all of China.” The Russian translation has “Great Qing state” (Танцынское государство).

contact and Ahmad Shah then responded to their overtures.

There are also views that would link this to a Muslim “alliance.” These are primarily based on information brought to Russia via the Kazakhs, and they suggest that around 1763–64 Ahmad Shah, in response to requests for assistance from Central Asian powers, dispatched a large army to fight against the Qing⁶⁾ and asked Kazakh rulers to provide troops and horses (Vel’iaminov-Zernov 2001: 147–149; Bregel 1999: 591–592). One such view mentions the sending of a mission and asserts that Ahmad Shah, prompted by a plea from the inhabitants of Kashgar and Yarkand for “liberation from infidel rule,” advanced into the region between Khoqand and Tashkent in 1763 and sent a mission of forty members to the Qing (Levshin 1832: 237–238; Valikhanov 1985: 232). However, at this time Ahmad Shah was engaged in a war against the Sikhs, and the actual timing of the mission’s departure (first half of 1761) and its route (via Badakhshan) do not match either. These views do not go beyond the realm of exaggerated rumors and wishful thinking (Bregel 1999: 592). While we cannot deny that a request for assistance may have been made from Central Asia and Ahmad Shah may have taken or attempted to take some action,⁷⁾ it would be rash to regard this as the motive for sending a mission to the Qing.

Several views have also been put forward on the aim of the negotiations. The first, as mentioned, was to demand the liberation of the Muslim inhabitants of Xinjiang from Qing rule. The second was a demand for the return of their ancestral lands to the Khwaja brothers or their children (TsK 2: 45; Valikhanov 1985: 324). To repeat what was noted above, these two views are based on rumors that spread throughout Central Asia in 1763–64. The third view is from a different viewpoint. Eijk and Timur (2023: 716–719), inferring the content of Ahmad Shah’s letter from excerpts in Qianlong’s edict, argue that it was a form of Persian letter called a “letter of victory” (*fath-nāma*), which extolled a monarch’s military victory. In other words, Ahmad Shah sent a “letter of victory” to inform the Qianlong emperor of his victory in northwest India and clearly assert the legitimacy of his own status and rule.

Although none of the above three points can be fully corroborated, they have points in common with Ahmad Shah’s letter as recorded in the Statement. Ahmad Shah acknowledged that there were “seven countries” in the world, one of which was China (Qing), but he objected to the Qing emperor’s rule over the towns of

6) One of the earliest pieces of such information was a report by Vozmirov, a merchant of Tara who returned from the Middle Jüz in autumn 1762, and he claimed that Ahmad Shah had sent a large army in an attempt to retake “the towns of Bukhara that had been occupied by China” (Gurevich 1979: 190).

7) In prior research, too, it was deemed from an early stage that Ahmad Shah only promised to provide assistance and did not actually do so (Vel’iaminov-Zernov 2001: 158).

Kashgar, Yarkand, Andijan, and Khoqand and all the Kazakhs, who were originally Muslim, and the emperor's possession of "one and a half countries." Furthermore, he reproached the Qing emperor, the only person to take an unfriendly stance towards him when there was no longer anyone else in the world hostile to him, and stated that he would mobilize a large army of over 400,000 to defeat the Chinese (ENK 2: 602; MOTsA 2: 180–181; TsK 2: 48). Ahmad Shah's resentment towards the Qing emperor for having subjugated a portion of the Muslims, his willingness to send troops against the Qing, and the flaunting of his unparalleled status and power to be seen here are consistent with the three points mentioned above.

Since we cannot consult Ahmad Shah's letter, we must defer any final conclusions. However, there can be little doubt that Ahmad Shah had a strong sense of rivalry with the Qing emperor and sought to display his status and power by dispatching a mission and sending a letter.

II. THE ARRIVAL OF THE AFGHAN MISSION

I. Yarkand

On QL 27.9.7 [1762/9/23],⁸⁾ the Afghan⁹⁾ mission arrived in Yarkand together with a mission from Badakhshan. When Shinju (Ma. Šinju, Ch. Xinju 新柱), the Grand Minister Superintendent (Ch. *banshi dachen* 辦事大臣) of Yarkand, asked them about the purpose of their visit, Khwaja Mir Khan replied that he had been ordered by Ahmad Shah, "Khan of the Afghans" (Ma. *Oohan i han*),¹⁰⁾ to offer horses in tribute to the Qing emperor and delivered Ahmad Shah's letter.¹¹⁾ The painting *Four Afghan Horses* (Ch. *Aiwuhan sijun* 愛烏罕四駿) by Giuseppe Castiglione held by the National Palace Museum in Taipei depicts the four horses offered on this occasion.¹²⁾

8) Rites performed at the end and start of the year in accordance with the Chinese lunisolar calendar have a bearing on the Qing reception of the missions, and so dates will be given accordingly (QL yy.mm.dd) except when dealing with events outside Qing territory.

9) Initially Afghan was rendered as "Aohan" or "Oohan" in Manchu sources, but it gradually came to be rendered as "Ai'uhan" or "Ai'ugan," a transliteration of Chinese "Aiwuhan" (愛烏罕). Manchu has no triphthongs, but when foreign words with a triphthong were transliterated, the medial form of *a* was inserted between the second and third vowels, and here this has been provisionally rendered with an apostrophe (').

10) The Manchu word *han* used as a title for Outer Vassals (Ch. *waihan* 外藩) and foreign rulers (e.g., the Russian tsar) is differentiated from the word *han* referring to the Qing emperor by the addition of a dot over the final *-n*; it is rendered as *haṅ* in this article.

11) XMD 58: 206–207, QL 27.9.12 [1762/10/28], memorial from Shinju et al.

12) No. K2A001049N000000000PAD. See also Feng 2002: 130–131; Eijk & Timur 2023: 725–726. There had originally been five horses, but one of them had been limping in Badakhshan and was left behind (XMD 58: 220, QL 27.9.17 [1762/11/2], memorial from Shinju et al.).

Ahmad Shah's letter was enclosed in a wooden tube. It was written in "Persian letters" (Ma. *Parsi hergen*) between lines marked on floral-patterned paper with gold-colored strips of paper. It was a lengthy letter written in small, intricate handwriting and took several days to translate.¹³⁾ After reading the completed translation, Shinju summarized its contents as follows:

Ahmad Shah's ancestors were all Afghan khans. However, during his reign, because he was young, he lost some tribal territory (*aiman*). Later, when he came of age, people rallied to him, and so he conquered [surrounding] areas and powers (*nukte*), subjugating vast tribal territories such as Hindustan, and now he has become a major power. Ahmad Shah further wishes to conquer and rule the tribal territory of Bukhara (*Buhar aiman*).¹⁴⁾

It seems that in his letter Ahmad Shah was announcing the expansion of his influence into Hindustan and other regions, and this aligns with the contents of the Statement. In addition, Shinju mentions Ahmad Shah's ambition to advance into the "tribal territory of Bukhara," which is not mentioned in the Statement. However, Shinju does not touch on criticism of the Qing's western campaign or his willingness to take military action, which, if mentioned, would have been considered problematic. Instead, Shinju states that the wording of the letter (or rather, its translation) was respectful and did not contain any problematic matters.¹⁵⁾

After the translation had been completed, Shinju returned Ahmad Shah's letter to Khwaja Mir Khan¹⁶⁾ and had them stay at the House for Envoys (Ma. *sigan* < Ch. *shiguan* 使館).¹⁷⁾ Then, on QL 27.9.16, accompanied by Siddiq, a resident of Yarkand who understood Persian, the mission was sent on its way. On this occasion, Shinju sent letters to towns in Xinjiang and to the provinces of Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanxi, and

13) XMD 58: 207.

14) XMD 58: 220.

15) XMD 58: 220. It is also conceivable that the person responsible for translating the letter from Persian may have deliberately omitted parts of the letter or otherwise altered the wording of the translation so as to avoid any trouble.

16) Shinju attached the Manchu translation of Ahmad Shah's letter, Sultan Shah's Persian letter, and its Manchu translation to his memorial and sent them to the Qianlong emperor (XMD 58: 207). According to the table of contents of the XMD (58: 8), "two reports" are attached to this memorial, but in actual fact there is only the Manchu translation of Sultan Shah's Persian letter addressed to Emin Khwaja (XMD 58: 208–209). When I checked at the First Historical Archives of China in March 2018, only the Manchu translation of Sultan Shah's letter could be viewed on their computer.

17) XMD 58: 222.

Zhili, asking them to ensure that the Afghan mission was welcomed properly.¹⁸⁾ For his part, the Qianlong emperor decreed that in the provincial capitals through which the mission from the Afghans, a “great tribe” (*yida buluo* 一大部落), would pass, “banquets should be held and theatrical equipment provided by which to demonstrate splendor and majesty,”¹⁹⁾ and he also gave orders that official camels be provided to the mission upon their return from Yarkand and that they be escorted to the border region.²⁰⁾ Sultan Khwaja, the *hakim beg* of Yengi-hisar, played an important role in Qing-Badakhshan relations at the time and had also visited Hindustan (Mosca 2013: 82). The Qianlong emperor ordered Yonggui 永貴 (Ma. Yunggui), the Councilor (Ch. *canzan dachen* 參贊大臣) of Kashgar, to have Sultan Khwaja travel to Beijing and send him as an escort on the Afghan mission’s return journey.²¹⁾ At this stage, the Qing dynasty attached great importance to Ahmad Shah and made thoroughgoing preparations to welcome the Afghan mission.

At the start of the eleventh month, when the Afghan mission was on its way to Beijing, Yonggui learnt that there were wives and children of Burhaniddin not only in Badakhshan but also in the land of the Afghans.²²⁾ Yonggui suggested that at an appropriate time Sultan Khwaja be dispatched to Ahmad Shah to ask him to have the wife and children sent to the Qing, and the Qianlong emperor endorsed this proposal.²³⁾ In the end this plan was abandoned because of the problem concerning Khwaja Mir Khan’s refusal to kowtow, but initially building relations with Ahmad Shah was an important task for the Qing.

2. Beijing

At the end of QL 27, the Afghan mission arrived in Beijing. Li (2013: 123–124) and Eijk and Timur (2023: 707–715) have already examined the mission’s activities in Beijing and the Qing court’s response. In this section I shall summarize the train of events with reference to these two studies.

On QL 27.12.29, Khwaja Mir Khan, along with envoys from Badakhshan, Khoqand, Urgench, the Small-Jüz Kazakhs, and *hakim begs* from several towns in Kashgaria (Ch. Huibu 回部; lit. “Muslim region”), welcomed the carriage bearing the Qianlong emperor at the Meridian Gate of the Forbidden City and then had an

18) XMD 58: 222–223.

19) GZSL 672: 20ab, QL 27.10.*guimao* 癸卯 (14) [1762/11/29].

20) QL 27.10.14 [1762/11/29], letter edict (Ch. *jixin shangyu* 寄信上諭) (QMJD 3: tx. 342–344; tr. 541–542); GZSL 672: 20b–21b, QL 27.10.*guimao* (14).

21) QL 27.10.14, letter edict (QMJD 3: tx. 337–339; tr. 539–540).

22) XMD 59: 214, QL 27.11.9 [1762/12/23], memorial from Yonggui et al.

23) XMD 60: 146–147, QL 27.12.24 [1763/2/6], memorial from Yonggui.

audience with him in the Palace of Renewed Splendor (Chonghua gong 重華宮).²⁴⁾ Khwaja Mir Khan knelt and presented Ahmad Shah's letter but refused to kowtow to the emperor and requested an audience in accordance with "their own etiquette." This refusal to kowtow predates the refusal of the British ambassador Macartney to kowtow in QL 58 (1793). The Grand Councilors (Ch. *junji dachen* 軍機大臣) present at the reception condemned Khwaja Mir Khan's action and strongly criticized him, saying, "The Great Ejen ("master"; i.e., Qing emperor) is the Lord who rules all under Heaven" and "The Great Ejen is just like Heaven; do you not bow before Heaven?"²⁵⁾ The worldview of the Qianlong emperor, who prided himself on being the person who best "conformed to Heaven," was underpinned by his "belief in the universality of the Way of Heaven" (Hamada 1993: 123–124). While the Grand Councilors' equating of the emperor with Heaven may seem excessive, their argument indicates that the universality of Heaven was considered self-evident and unquestionable and was a trump card used to prevail upon those who challenged the Qing order.

In the face of this criticism, Khwaja Mir Khan ultimately acceded to their demand and kowtowed to the emperor, albeit in an awkward manner.²⁶⁾ This probably grudging stance would have poured cold water over the Qing's belief in the universality of the Way of Heaven. As a result, the Qianlong emperor canceled plans to send a mission to Ahmad Shah and have the Afghan mission escorted as far as the frontier region, and he also made the following comment:

Now that I have witnessed such comportment on the part of the envoy sent by the Afghans, Ahmad Shah is surely not someone living quietly. At this rate, the people of Badakhshan or the people of places such as Andijan may join the skin of their bellies (i.e., collude with each other), watch for a chance, and seize and harm our Muslim region.²⁷⁾

Qianlong thus expressed alarm at the possible collusion of Central Asian forces, partly because of several incidents that coincided with the arrival of the Afghan

24) QJZ, 005185: 65–67; GZSL 677: 18b, QL 27.12.*dingsi* 丁巳 (29) [1763/2/11].

25) XMD 60: 419, QL 28.1.3 [1763/2/15], letter edict; QMJD 4: tx. 8–9; tr. 469. In the QMJD it is wrongly stated that this edict was issued on QL 27.12.28.

26) XMD 60: 419. A similar incident had occurred during the early Kaiyuan 開元 era (713–741) of the Tang. When an Arab (Ch. Dashi 大食 < Tājī(k)) envoy had an audience with Xuanzong 玄宗, he said that in their country they made obeisance only to God (i.e., Allah), and even when having an audience with the king, they did not prostrate themselves. The Chinese officials criticized this, and so the Arabs made obeisance in accordance with "Chinese etiquette" (JT 198, "Dashi guo" 大食國).

27) XMD 60: 420.

mission, namely, the assumption of the title of *han* by Irdana Bi of the Khoqand Khanate²⁸⁾ and his attack on the Kirghiz Edigene tribe, as well as the conflict between Badakhshan and Bolor (Saguchi 1963: 77–80, 351–359; Newby 2005: 30–35; Onuma 2014: 204–206). While Qianlong’s irritation at the ongoing instability in Central Asia following the western campaign is evident, I would like to stress the fact that his concern about those “seizing and harming our Muslim region” was not a response to demands for the liberation of Muslims in Xinjiang or the return of land to the Khwaja family.

Between QL 27.1.3 [1763/2/15] and 1.19 [3/3], the Afghan mission attended various events hosted by the Qing court.²⁹⁾ On the 9th, a grand banquet was held in Changchun Garden 暢春園 of the Western Yard, followed by a “grand review” (*dayue* 大閱) of military exercises, and Qianlong ordered the envoys from Central Asia, including Khwaja Mir Khan, to observe these military exercises.³⁰⁾ Li Xiao has pointed out that this grand review was exceptional and was specially decided on in order to intimidate the Afghans with their defiant attitude by means of a display of Qing military might (Li 2013: 123). When foreign envoys arrived, the Qing court would showcase its military prowess through hunting, horse racing, archery, wrestling, and fireworks. However, troop reviews during the New Year period were rare during the Qianlong reign, and the only other confirmed instance was in the first month of QL 42, which was attended by the newly submitted native chieftains (*tusi* 土司) from Jinchuan 金川.³¹⁾ Nevertheless, as mentioned, Qianlong had ordered the provinces along the route to Beijing to display “splendor and majesty” to the Afghan envoy. It must be regarded as an exceptional and well-prepared grand review in spite of Khwaja Mir Khan’s refusal to kowtow. Furthermore, there would have been a strong awareness of the presence of envoys from Badakhshan and Khoqand, regions that were causing trouble in Central Asia.

On 2.1, Shinju, having received Qianlong’s edict, reported that Khwaja Mir Khan had in fact met with him in Yarkand with the “supreme etiquette of Muslims,” which Shinju had not, however, regarded as a “submissive act” and had sternly ordered him

28) At the time *han* was one of the titles granted by the emperor to subjects within Qing territory, and how to treat the title of *han* used by rulers outside its borders was becoming an issue (Onuma 2023: 68–69). It is possible that a desire to avoid the use of *han* influenced the change in spelling from Hojo Mirhan to Hojo Mir(a)ha mentioned in note 4.

29) QJZ, 005186; 005187. See also the table in Onuma 2024: 35.

30) GZSL 678: 11ab, QL 28.1.*dingmao* 丁卯 (9) [1763/2/21]. The grand review consisted of a demonstration of gun formation training (Ch. *qiang zhen fa* 鎗陣法) by the elite troops (*jianruiying* 健銳營) and firearms troops (*huoqiying* 火器營) (QJZ, 005186: 27–28).

31) GZSL 1024: 7a, QL 42.1.*bingzi* 丙子 (9) [1777/2/16].

to learn and perform the Qing court's audience etiquette (i.e., kowtowing).³²⁾ While this may have been no more than Shinju's attempt at self-justification on having learnt of what had happened, Khwaja Mir Khan's refusal to kowtow to the emperor nonetheless altered the Qing treatment of the Afghan mission. Qianlong had ordered all provinces along the mission's route on its journey to Beijing to provide a warm welcome, but for its return journey he gave brusque instructions that it would suffice to take care of the envoy's needs as required and there was no need to prepare any banquets.³³⁾ The cold treatment of the Afghan mission was not due to any requests in Beijing for the liberation of Muslims in Xinjiang or the return of ancestral lands to the Khwaja family, but was rather a direct consequence of the envoy's "disrespectful behavior" in refusing to kowtow to the emperor.

III. THE DRAFTING OF QIANLONG'S EDICT AND ITS CONTENTS

Ahmad Shah's letter was retranslated at the Qing court, and the individual entrusted with the translation was Bay Khwaja, a Muslim residing in Beijing.³⁴⁾ Originally from Turfan, Bay Khwaja served as the first Company Commander (*zuoling* 佐領) of the Muslim *niru*, overseeing the Turkic Muslim Camp (Ch. *Huizi ying* 回子營) established within Beijing's Inner City (Onuma 2009: 31; Onuma 2012: 37–46). As Ma Zimu has already pointed out, for some time after the western campaign of QL 24, Bay Khwaja was involved in translating correspondence between the Qing central government and Central Asian powers (Ma 2019: 171). However, it is unclear from historical sources whether he himself translated this particular Persian letter.

Subsequently, a draft of Qianlong's edict addressed to Ahmad Shah was prepared. According to a report from the Grand Councilors, a final draft was first prepared in Tod-script Mongolian (Oyirad),³⁵⁾ and this was then translated into Manchu, Chinese, and Turkic.³⁶⁾ We cannot state with any certainty whether all four of these languages were included in Qianlong's edict. In the second half of the eighteenth century, edicts issued by Qing emperors to Central Asian rulers were usually written in Manchu, Oyirad, and Turkic, and it is to be supposed that the Chinese text was not included in the edict addressed to Ahmad Shah either. The Chinese translation was probably

32) XMD 60: 420–421, QL 28.2.3 [1763/3/17], memorial from Shinju et al.

33) GZSL 679: 12ab, QL 28.1.*renwu* 壬午 (24) [1763/3/8].

34) XMD 60: 342, QL 28.1.24 [1763/2/7].

35) For about twenty years after the fall of the Junghars, Oyirad continued to serve as a written language used in contacts with Central Asian powers (especially the Kazakhs) (Onuma 2014: 167–168).

36) XMD 61: 194, QL 28.2, memorandum of the Grand Council.

prepared for reference by the Qing central government. In addition, Qianlong's edict referenced Ahmad Shah's letter (or rather its translation), and the Qing court had Bay Khwaja verify that the passages in question matched the original Persian text.³⁷⁾ However, no Persian translation of Qianlong's edict was produced in Beijing.³⁸⁾

In the following I shall present a translation of the Manchu text of Qianlong's edict, based on the text contained in the JMSD. The translation has been divided into paragraphs in accordance with its contents. For a transcription of the Manchu text, reference can be made to Onuma 2024: 39–41.

Decree of the Emperor holding the course of time by order of Heaven.

I send [this edict] to Ahmad Shah of Afghan. The Amban (i.e., Qing administrator, frontier agent) of Yarkand sent a report that you have, in all sincerity, dedicated a letter to me, seeking my benevolence, and dispatched your envoy. I was very impressed by your sincerity and immediately ordered the Amban of Yarkand to dispatch Imperial Guards to escort [your envoys] on their journey [to my place]. In accordance with my order, the Amban of Yarkand dispatched Imperial Guards, who safely escorted your envoys, including Khwaja Mir Khan. [Khwaja Mir Khan] had an audience with me and submitted your letter. I then issued an imperial order to arrange a banquet and presents to be bestowed on you, Ahmad Shah, [as follows]: a piece of dragon-patterned silk damask, a piece of python-patterned silk damask, two pieces of brocade, two pieces of Zhangzhou damask, three pieces of floral-patterned silk damask, a piece of gros-grain, a piece of gold-lined silk damask, a small piece of python-patterned silk damask, five pieces of large silk damask, five pieces of damask from eight raw silk yarns, three pieces of damask from five raw silk yarns, three pieces of pongee, two pieces of twill damask, four glass vessels, two enameled vessels, four ceramic vessels, two jars of tea leaves, one jar of snuff tobacco, one snuff tobacco pot, a pair of large bags, and eight small bags; to Khwaja Mir Khan [as follows]: a short sable fur coat, a piece of python-patterned silk damask, three pieces of brocade, two pieces of glossy damask, two pieces of large silk damask, two pieces of damask from five raw silk yarns, two pieces of feather damask, two carpets, 120 pieces of silver-gray rat fur, two pairs of large bags with a floral pattern, six small bags, a glass vessel, two ceramic vessels, a jar of tea leaves, one snuff tobacco pot, a flint tool, and 200 silver taels; to two envoys,

37) XMD 61: 191, QL 28.2, memorandum of the Grand Council.

38) The Muslim Office (*huihui guan* 回回館), an agency for translating Persian that was established in the early Ming, survived into the early Qing, but it soon existed in name only. Eventually it disappeared in 1784 (QL 13) as a result of consolidation (Wang 2006).

per man [as follows]: three pieces of damask from five raw silk yarns and 40 silver taels; to nine attendants, per man [as follows]: a piece of damask from five raw silk yarns and 30 silver taels. I have entrusted Khwaja Mir Khan to carry the various goods that I bestowed to you and hand them over to you.

Also, [I heard that] you, Ahmad Shah, have been wanting to dispatch your envoy for a long time to inquire about my well-being. However, because your [land of] Afghans³⁹⁾ is located in a faraway land, and formerly the Junghars and Muslims (i.e., the Uyghurs at present) lay between us, you could not dispatch envoys to the Great Central Kingdom.⁴⁰⁾ I have now been informed that, on hearing that the Great Sacred Ejen (i.e., the Qing emperor) made the Junghars, Muslims, and Kirghiz submit [to the Qing dynasty], you sincerely rejoiced in it and sent the letter to inquire about my well-being. I originally had no intention to make the Junghars and Muslims my subjects and occupy their land. [However,] since their countries had been destroyed and they were living in turmoil, I decided to calm the confusion and ensure peace for many living people.

Regarding the circumstances of the Junghars, after the death of their leader Galdan Tsering, they fell into disorder and collapsed as a result of internal conflict. Dawachi killed Lamadarja and enthroned himself, and Tsering and Tsering Ubashi from the [Dorbet] tribe, as well as the headmen of the other tribes, left the Junghars and eventually brought their nomadic tribesmen to submit to me. Since I could not bear to see their turmoil, and in order to conform with the will of Heaven, I immediately dispatched the Great Army (i.e., the Qing army) to Ili, captured Dawachi, and subdued the turmoil of the Junghars. Subsequently, Amursana, who rose in rebellion, was defeated by the Great Army and ran away to [the land of] the Kazakhs. The Great Army pursued him and reached [the land of] the Kazakhs. Hereupon, Ablay, [a leader of] the Kazakhs, said, "I want to become a subject of the Ejen," and bowed his head. Thus, finding himself in deep trouble, Amursana fled in the direction of Russia and died as a consequence of his evil actions. Russia presented Amursana's dead body [to the Qing].

Regarding the circumstances of the Muslims, Khwaja Jahan's brothers had originally been captives of the Junghars. When my Great Army suppressed Ili, they granted mercy [to the brothers], liberated them from capture, and sent them to their native place. However, Khwaja Jahan and Buruhaniddin neglected their duties, recklessly made the Muslim people suffer, disobeyed my great favor,

39) In Manchu, the names of groups are often also used as regional concepts.

40) I.e., the Qing. Manchu *durimbai gurun* corresponds to Chinese *zhongguo* 中國, but in this case *zhongguo* refers not to China but to the "Central Dynasty."

and killed my envoys. For these reasons, while returning after exterminating the Junghars, my army received the news of [the revolt of] Khwaja Jahan, destroyed Khwaja Jahan and Buruhaniddin, and conquered all the Muslim towns, including Yarkand, Kashgar, and Aqsu; the Kirghiz also submitted to me. Since Khwaja Jahan's brothers had been tracked down, they escaped with his family to Badakhshan. I issued an edict to the commanders: "No matter where the traitors escape, you must pursue and seize them; no matter what, they should not get away. If they enter into Badakhshan, you should make your way to the border land [of Badakhshan]. No blame shall be attached to Badakhshan. Never torment them." Therefore, the commanders led the army to advance via three routes, including Qara Tubet, and approached Badakhshan. The commanders simply dispatched an envoy [to Sultan Shah] to capture them. Sultan Shah killed Khwaja Jahan's brothers and presented their heads [to the Qing].⁴¹⁾ Thereafter, the ways opened, and tribes such as Badakhshan and Khoqand also submitted [to the Qing], thereby receiving my great favor. Since their land is very far away, I, in order to show mercy, collect neither food nor tax from them. When they dispatch envoys every two or three years to inquire about my well-being, I send them gifts in return.

Also, Ahmad Shah, according to your letter, Nabalac'y (i.e., Balaji Baji Rao, also known as Nana Sahib),⁴²⁾ a leader in a region called Maratha (i.e., Maratha Confederacy), came to know that you had occupied the town of Jahanabad (i.e., Delhi). Hence, he came to Karnal to attack you, with 600,000 cavalymen, 500,000 infantrymen, and 3,000 artillerymen from regions such as Maratha, Rajiput, Deccan, Sikh,⁴³⁾ Haibaši (i.e., Ḥabshī?), Janggibar, and Teburis Kadziguyen.⁴⁴⁾ However, when they heard that you yourself had gone there, they took refuge in the town of Panipat. As a result of your siege for six months, their food ran short and they had to flee the town. You pursued them and killed 30 to 40 of their higher headmen and about 100,000 soldiers, and seized tens of thousands of their various assets [such as] gold, silver, canons, and elephants.⁴⁵⁾

41) In actual fact only Khwaja Jahan's head was presented to the Qing. A skull cup made from his severed head is currently held by the National Palace Museum in Taipei (Lai 2014).

42) I follow Mosca's identification of Nabalac'y (Mosca 2013: 82).

43) I take Manchu *sinha* to mean "Sikh." It is not known how many Sikhs joined the Maratha Army, but it does not seem unnatural for the Sikhs, whom Ahmad Shah perceived as adversaries in India, to be mentioned alongside Rajiput and Deccan.

44) Haibaši, etc., are difficult to identify, and the Manchu transcriptions have been given as they are. According to Ogura Satoshi 小倉智史, Haibaši may possibly correspond to Ḥabshī, a group who migrated from Ethiopia (Ḥabash) to the Deccan.

45) It is difficult to give accurate figures, but according to Sarkar (1934: 348–349), the

[As mentioned above,] although Nabalac’y gathered many [people] and came to attack you, he could not win and took refuge in the town of Panipat. You say that [the number of soldiers was] over 1,000,000; is this true or false? But since you say so, I believe it must be true.

In addition, you, Ahmad Shah, say in the letter, “I want to take over Bukhara. However, if I send troops to Bukhara, the Great Ejen will say, ‘Bukhara has submitted to me; you cannot attack it’, and reprimand me.” However, the envoys from Bukhara never arrived; therefore, it is difficult for me to judge whether Bukhara is good or evil. If the envoys from Bukhara arrive, I shall be able to judge them then.

I am a Great Ejen ruling over all under Heaven. The people of neighboring tribes do not disturb the order and maintain peace; hence, I am more affectionate towards them. If evil and shambolic matters arise, I shall invariably subdue them. Since those two, Amursana and Khwaja Jahan, acted against [Heaven], I immediately took them over. Since Sultan Shah had a deferential attitude, I provided him with benefits. Ahmad Shah, your letter says that you want to receive my favor like Sultan Shah and have dispatched your envoy, which is very deferential. I am very pleased. Therefore, I provide you with several benefits and present you with various goods such as silk damask, glass vessels, and ceramic vessels. Ahmad Shah, your letter says that you have not been at peace for the past few years; you are always at war here and there. Under such circumstances, your subjects are in trouble! Hereafter, you should be good to your neighbors. If you maintain order and live calmly, everyone in your land will be happy and receive my favor forever. I have issued [this edict] specially.

Qianlong’s edict can be broadly divided into five parts. The first part describes the reception of the Afghan mission and lists the gifts given to them.⁴⁶⁾ The placing of such content at the start is also found in other imperial edicts issued to influential figures outside the Qing.

The second part explains the circumstances behind the western campaign from a Qing perspective. In order to emphasize the legitimacy of the Qing conquests, it describes in comparative detail the disloyal acts of Amursana and Khwaja Jahan and

Marathas lost 22,000 men as captives, 50,000 horses, 200,000 cattle, some thousands of camels, and 500 elephants.

46) Although not mentioned in Qianlong’s edict, Khwaja Mir Khan was given medicine for the eyes (*Ma. yasai okto*) and medicinal cloves (*Ma. dingdzi okto*) together with explanations of how to use them written in Oyirad and Turkic (XMD 60: 191, QL 27.2, memorandum of the Grand Council).

their subsequent fates, and also mentions the “submission” of the Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Badakhshan, and Khoqand. If Ahmad Shah’s letter had criticized the Qing occupation of Muslim towns and powers in Central Asia as noted in the Statement, this part could be seen as Qianlong’s rebuttal of this criticism.

The third part discusses Ahmad Shah’s victory in the Battle of Panipat and references the contents of Ahmad Shah’s letter, as does the fourth part. The composition and movements of the Maratha Confederacy, regardless of their veracity,⁴⁷⁾ are described in more concrete detail than in the text included in the PZF. Moreover, one can discern in the exaggeration of the enemy forces to more than a million men Ahmad Shah’s intention to make his own forces appear powerful. This would have been perceived as a provocative stance by Qianlong and his court.

The fourth part mentions plans to advance into Bukhara. The problem here lies in determining the scope of “Bukhara” as understood by Ahmad Shah, who considered it to have “submitted” to the Qing emperor. First, the translation produced in Yarkand refers to the “tribal territory of Bukhara” (*Ma. Buhar aiman*), suggesting a geographical area broader than just the town of Bukhara itself. One can point to two possibilities. One is that it refers to the territory of the so-called Bukhara Khanate (under the Manghit dynasty at the time). Fazil Bi, the ruler of Ura-tepa, fought with the khanates of Bukhara and Khoqand from 1754 to 1760 and is said to have sought assistance from Ahmad Shah (Valikhanov 1985: 324; Onuma et al. 2014: 389, 400–401). If this was the case, it would mean that Ahmad Shah was planning a campaign against the Bukhara Khanate and was sounding out in his letter whether the Qing would intervene. However, there is no mention of a campaign against Bukhara in the Statement, and this interpretation seems somewhat out of place.⁴⁸⁾ Another possibility is that “Bukhara” refers vaguely and even more broadly to northern Central Asia as seen from Afghanistan. According to the Statement, in his letter Ahmad Shah criticized the fact that the towns of Kashgar, Yarkand, Andijan, and Khoqand and all the Kazakhs were under the Qing emperor and indicated a willingness to take military action against them. If words to this effect were actually included in his letter, then the “(tribal territory of) Bukhara,” which Ahmad Shah considered to have “submitted” to the Qing emperor and which he was planning to invade, would correspond to this broad region. While direct evidence cannot be provided, judging from correspondences with the Statement, I take the position that the latter interpretation is the

47) The account of the Marathas’ besiegement in Panipat and the Afghan army’s six-month siege of the town in Ahmad Shah’s letter differs from the historical facts.

48) As discussed in section I, it is difficult to recognize as historical fact the information that in 1763 Ahmad Shah led a large army to the region between Khoqand and Tashkent.

more plausible,⁴⁹⁾ in which case Ahmad Shah was informing the Qing emperor in his letter of a campaign against these towns and powers. But the Qing understood “Bukhara” to mean the town or khanate of Bukhara and consequently responded in a way that missed the mark to a considerable degree.

The fifth part is Qianlong’s declaration to Ahmad Shah. The advice to look after his people and maintain good relations with his neighbors is a conventional statement used at the conclusion of similar edicts. However, by strongly contrasting the annihilation of those who had been disloyal and the generous treatment of the submissive Sultan Shah, the edict is structured in such a way as to rein in Ahmad Shah.

To restate the circumstances at the time, after the envoy’s refusal to kowtow on QL 27.12.29, Qianlong’s view of Ahmad Shah changed dramatically, and on QL 28.1.9 a grand review was held to demonstrate the Qing’s military might. During this time, the Qing court translated Ahmad Shah’s letter and then drafted Qianlong’s edict, which was issued on 1.11. The translation of Ahmad Shah’s letter may not only have boasted of his power by describing the expansion of his influence into northwest India, but may also have given notice of a campaign against Muslim towns and powers in Central Asia under Qing rule. While the Qing did not fully grasp this, Qianlong, in his reply in the form of his edict, vigorously asserted the legitimacy of the western campaign and forestalled Ahmad Shah, who might “seize and harm our Muslim region.”⁵⁰⁾

CONCLUSION

Immediately after his victory at the Battle of Panipat in January 1761, Ahmad Shah sent a mission to the Qing. In his letter to the Qianlong emperor, Ahmad Shah boasted of his power, emphasizing his victory in northwest India, and declared his intention to conduct a campaign against the “(tribal territory of) Bukhara,” which had submitted to the Qing emperor. I take the view that this “(tribal territory of) Bukhara” refers to the Muslim towns and powers in Central Asia under Qing rule and consider that Ahmad Shah was giving expression to his strong sense of rivalry with the Qing emperor. The emphasis of his crushing victory in India had the effect of strongly characterizing this letter as both a “letter of victory” and a written protest. The reason that the mission was sent immediately after the Battle of Panipat was that

49) I would surmise that the “(tribal territory of) Bukhara” mentioned here is close to Bukharia as used in Russian at the time to refer to East and West Turkistan.

50) In addition, the Qing court also gained information about Afghanistan’s geography, trade, produce, occupations, etc., from Khwaja Mir Khan and Sultan Khwaja (Onuma 2024: 46–48; Onuma 2025).

it would have been perfect timing for Ahmad Shah.

It seems that the Qing did not accurately grasp the meaning of Ahmad Shah's letter and initially welcomed the arrival of the Afghan mission with meticulous preparations. On arriving in Beijing, Khwaja Mir Khan had an audience with the Qianlong emperor and presented Ahmad Shah's letter to the emperor, but because he was reluctant to kowtow, the Qing central government's attitude towards Ahmad Shah and his mission hardened. Meanwhile, the claim, previously made on the basis of Russian sources, that Ahmad Shah asked the Qing government to liberate Muslims in Xinjiang and return their ancestral lands to the Khwaja family cannot be confirmed from the negotiations conducted in Beijing in early 1763.

Ahmad Shah's letter, written in Persian, was translated not only in Yarkand but also in Beijing. After the completion of the letter's translation, the Qing court drafted Qianlong's edict addressed to Ahmad Shah. The drafting of the edict began with the preparation of a final draft in Tod-script Mongolian (Oyirad), after which it was translated into Manchu, Chinese, and Turkic. Bay Khwaja and other Muslims residing in Beijing were involved in the translation of Ahmad Shah's letter and its collation with Qianlong's edict, but no Persian translation of the edict was produced. The suspicions and wariness regarding Ahmad Shah that arose in Beijing were strongly reflected in Qianlong's edict, and the Qianlong emperor warned Ahmad Shah against encroaching on the Qing sphere of influence. Furthermore, the treatment of the Afghan mission entrusted with delivering this edict was downgraded on its return journey, and plans to send a mission to Ahmad Shah were also abandoned.

After leaving Beijing, the Afghan mission is said to have waged an anti-Qing campaign among the people of the lands through which it passed on its return journey, urging them to join forces with Ahmad Shah (Vel'iaminov-Zernov 2001: 155). This may be supposed to have amplified the image of Ahmad Shah as a rival of the Qing and to have generated various rumors in Central Asia. There can be no doubt that moves to form a Muslim "alliance" centered around Ahmad Shah and calls for a "holy war," which intensified in 1763–64, were premised on the existence of the mission to the Qing. It is hoped that the observations presented above will contribute to a better understanding of the issues.

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