



CHINESE TURKESTAN VI. IRANIAN GROUPS IN SINKIANG SINCE THE 1750S

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vi. Iranian Groups in Sinkiang since the 1750s

Between the late 17th and 19th centuries many Iranian-speaking peoples from Šeġnān (Shughnan) and Wākān (Wakhan) migrated to the region of the eastern Pamirs around Lake Zorkul (Sarīqūl, also known as Lake Victoria), now in the Tadzhik S.S.R., and mingled with the nomadic groups of Iranian descent already established there. In 1168/1755 the armies of the Manchu Ching (Qing) dynasty (1644-1911) of China destroyed the Zungar khanate, then turned their attention to the oases south of the Tien Shan range (see v, above). They advanced steadily through the Tarim basin, and the Khoja rulers at the western end fled, pursued by the army as far as [Badakṣān](#) in northern Afghanistan. A detachment commanded by General Fu-de was sent to search for them near Lake Zorkul, where the population submitted to the Ching empire without a struggle (Fu et al., chap. 77, fols. 1r-4v, 24v-25v; Kuznetsov). Although the Iranian inhabitants of the region were known to the Chinese simply as “Tajiks” (Ta-ji-ke; Mathews nos. 5978-476-3320), they probably spoke the Pamir languages Wakhi, Shughni, and Sarikoli, rather than Tajiki Persian (see [central asia xiii. iranian languages](#)). This seminomadic group is also



known as “mountain Tajiks” (*tājīkān-e sar-kūhī*, Uighur *sarqari* or *sarqiri*; Sotūda, p. 563) and is distinct from the sedentary Persian-speaking Tajiks farther north and west. At the beginning of the 12th/18th century the mountain Tajiks were converted to Isma‘īli Shi‘ism (Xiao, 1983, p. 9).

The Chinese governed the newly conquered territory through indigenous *begs*, who collected taxes, maintained order, supervised irrigation, and so on under the direction of Manchu officials. In the eastern Pamirs, where Tashqurghan (Ta-shi-ku-er-gan) was the most important town, seven *begs* were appointed, one fifth-level *ḥākem beg* and four sixth-level and two seventh-level *begs*, who were answerable to a Manchu imperial agent (*pan-shi da-chen*) stationed at Yarkand (Suo-che; Fu et al., 1970, chap. 30, fols. 21r-v). During the first century of Chinese rule the population of the region gradually increased. According to the report of one local administrator in 1759, the Tajiks had “formerly numbered 500 households, paying 50 taels [a unit of weight] of gold to Yarkand, but now there are only slightly more than 110 households with a population of about 400” (Fu et al., 1970, chap. 77, fols. 24v-25r). At the end of the 18th century mountain Tajiks began to settle in villages among the predominantly Turkish population around Yarkand (So-che), Poskam (Po-si-kan-mu), and Karghalik (Ye-cheng), along the old Southern Silk Road. A census probably taken in the 1850s listed 432 Tajik households in fifteen villages, paying a tax of 27.7 taels of gold and 1,700 *jins* of saltpeter. The number of sixth-level *begs* had been reduced to two and that of seventh-level *begs* increased to five, for a total of eight (*Ya-er-jiang-cheng*; cf. Hori).

Beginning in the 1820s Chinese rule in the western Tarim basin was seriously challenged by descendants of the Āfāqī Khojas, most notably K̄vāja Jahāngīr in 1826; the khans of Kokand (K̄okand) in Fergana (Farḡāna), who were descended from the Uzbeks, supported these efforts, in order to obtain a share of the trade with China (Tōru, pp. 405ff.; Kim, pp. 16-39). K̄vāja Jahāngīr and several other family members made repeated incursions and sometimes even succeeded in occupying larger towns like Kashgar and Yarkand. The mountain Tajiks, though Shi‘ites, and the neighboring Kirghiz Turks participated in these “holy wars” against the “infidel” (Valikhanov, III, p. 142), lured by the prospect of booty. Nevertheless, when the khanate of Kokand began actively to expand into the Tien Shans and the Pamirs, even attempting to occupy Tashqurghan, the *begs* and their supporters, whose prerogatives were in jeopardy, opposed their fellow Muslims (*Zhong-guo*, p. 233; Valikhanov, III, p. 148).

In 1282/1865 an emirate was established in Kashgaria under the control of



Ya'qūb Beg (1282-1304/1865-77), who was originally from Kokand. The mountain Tajiks suffered under his rule, and after 1868 many were forcibly resettled in Kashgar, where they could be more easily controlled and posed no further threat to security on the borders (Hayward, p. 109; Sayramī, p. 231); according to T. D. Forsyth, in 1873 “the hamlets are at present in a wretched looking state, the houses have fallen to ruin.” The number of households in Tagharma near Tashqurghan, for example, had shrunk from fifty to four (Forsyth, pp. 223, 269). According to A. N. Kuropatkin, who visited Kashgaria in 1876, Tashqurghan was at that time administered as an independent district of the emirate (p. 40). Meanwhile, after the forced removal of the Tajiks the area near Lake Zorkul was populated mainly by Kirghiz (Kuropatkin, p. 50).

Ya'qūb Beg died at the end of May 1877, a year after the Kokand khanate had been incorporated into the expanding Russian empire. Although Ḥākem Khan Tūra, one of the Āfāqī Khojas, was proclaimed his successor, severe conflict between him and Ya'qūb Beg's son Beg Qolī put an end to the emirate. By the end of the year the Manchus had fully reconquered the Tarim and Dzungar basins as far west as the new Russian border. At the beginning of 1879 Ḥākem Khan invaded Kashgaria with about 2,000 soldiers and succeeded in taking the Tashqurghan area, but he was expelled by the army of Liu Jin-tang, commander of the Manchu troops in the Tarim basin (Yuan, chap. 97, fols. 10v-22v). In response to the pressures of Russian expansionism the Chinese government sought to strengthen its own control of the Tarim basin by incorporating the region as the province of Sinkiang (Xin-jiang) and instituting a number of reforms, including abolition of the *beg* system and concomitant reorganization of the administrative structure.

In 1895 Lake Zorkol and all the territory north of the Wākān corridor as far east as Qoqrāš Qōl, now Povalo-Shveïkovskii peak, were incorporated into the Russian empire (see [boundaries iii. boundaries of afghanistan](#)). In 1902 the remnant of the region that remained under Chinese rule, the area around Tashqurghan, was placed under the Yarkand administrative district, and an official with the title “second-class subprefect” (*tong-pan*) was dispatched to administer it. In 1911, after the establishment of the Republic of China, the Yarkand district, with a total of twenty-seven villages, was designated Pu-li (known locally as Varšīda; Pakhalina, p. 3) after an ancient city-state in the region (Feng, pp. 93-94; Xiao, 1983, p. 17). The population of this remote border area was largely Iranian, in contrast to the other areas of Sinkiang, where Turks predominated.



The new Chinese government was, however, beset by serious internal conflicts and unable to exercise effective control of Sinkiang; the region was thus dominated by a series of warlords, recognized by the central government but operating virtually independently. Although the *beg* system was abolished in other parts of the province, it continued in Pu-li until 1926, probably owing to the peculiar ethnic character of this remote mountain region. The Tajik population grew steadily, reaching 6,169 (1,805 households) in Pu-li alone (Sung, chap. 1, fol. 11r). The first warlord of Sinkiang, the autocratic Yang Zeng-xin, was assassinated by political rivals in 1928 (*Xin jiang*, pp. 76-91; Forbes, pp. 33-37). He was succeeded by Jin Shuren, who showed himself unable to deal with insurrections in Ha-mi (former Qomul) at the eastern end of the basin and with an invasion by Ma Zhong-ying, a Muslim warlord from Kansu province, whose intervention was invited by the rebels (Hedin, 1936; Boorman, II, pp. 463-64). In 1933 he was succeeded by Sheng Shi-cai, a Han Chinese who had begun his career under Chang Kai-shek and who at first pursued a policy of compromise among ideological and ethnic groups (Boorman, III, pp. 120-23); by then the Tajiks, who numbered 8,867, had been officially recognized as a minority (Lattimore, et al., p. 110). In the early 1940s, however, the ruling Kuomintang (Guo-min-dang) party adopted a policy of forced assimilation of minorities and determined opposition to the spread of the Chinese communist party, a policy that Sheng pursued vigorously in Sinkiang and that was continued by his successors after his departure in 1944 (*Xinjiang*; Forbes, pp. 158-69). These developments resulted in considerable turmoil, particularly north of the Tien Shans. In the western Tarim basin the Tajiks organized a revolutionary force of about 200 men and occupied the Pu-li district in 1945. In 1946 they reached an agreement with the government and disbanded (Xiao, 1983, pp. 41-43), but the Kuomintang nevertheless continued its oppressive policy. The Tajiks thus joined the communist Partisans of the Red Tents, the local communist party (Lattimore et al., p. 139). In December 1949 Sinkiang came under the control of the People's Republic of China, and in 1955 it was incorporated into the Sinkiang-Uighur Autonomous Region. In 1954 Pu-li district became Tashqurghan Tajik Autonomous District. Nevertheless, at the same time the central government decreed that only Chinese and Uighur could be taught in the schools of the region (Sotūda, p. 564). As a result about two-thirds of the present Tajik population in the area around Tashqurghan speak some Uighur, along with their native languages, Wakhi, Shughni, and Sarikoli, and Tajiki Persian. Those settled in the villages in the oases of the western Tarim basin generally speak only Uighur. Some urban Tajiks attained positions of importance in local government; for



example, Zolāl, a Persian-speaking Tajik, was governor of Kashgar during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1965-68; Sotūda, p. 564).

According to the 1978 census, the total Tajik population in Sinkiang was 22,000, of whom 60 percent were concentrated in Tashqurghan and the remainder scattered among other cities of Kashgaria (*Zhong-guo*, p. 230). In 1985 there were approximately 26,000 “mountain Tajiks” in China, 68 percent of them living in the Tashkhourqan governorate (Xiao, pp. 2, 8, 9, 80). The remainder were settled in autonomous communities (*xiang*) in the nearby districts of Yarkand (Zarepshat *xiang*), Poskam (Buyluk *xiang*), Guma (Pi-shan; Nurawat *xiang*), and Akhtu (Bostan *xiang*). According to Manūčehr Sotūda (p. 563), in 1988 there were only twelve Tajik families left in Kashgar.

Of the fifty-six nationalities in the modern Chinese population only the Tajiks and the Russians, who immigrated in modern times, are of Indo-European stock. The Tajiks in the Pamirs around Tashqurghan are seminomadic. They are monogamous; large families are typical, with three or four generations represented in a single household. Each household is a self-contained productive unit governed by the head of the family, usually the oldest male of the senior generation. The people live mainly from raising livestock, especially sheep and yaks. In this region the tail of a single *donba* (fat-tailed) sheep may yield 15 kg of fat. In addition, some cold-resistant crops like barley and beans are grown; a few cows are kept for milk, both camels and horses are used for transport, and oxen draw the plows (Sotūda, p. 564). Each year after the spring planting in the valleys the men take their animals up the mountains, returning to the villages once or twice during the summer in order to water and weed the crops and in the autumn for the harvest. Once snow begins to fall in the mountains, usually in late October, the animals are brought down to pasture near the villages, where the herdsmen spend the winter. The houses are usually cubical, with flat roofs, and are constructed of wood and clay. Often the interior is not subdivided into rooms; rather, clay platforms are built around the inner walls for sitting and sleeping. The most characteristic item of Tajik dress is the hat. Men wear tall black-fur hats with rounded tops, and women wear embroidered cotton caps with rounded tops and ribbons at the back.

As Isma‘ili Shi‘ites most Tajiks do not perform the five daily prayers or observe Ramažān as their predominantly Sunnite Turkish neighbors do. Sometimes they prefer to pray in a *jam‘-kāna* (communal hall), rather than in the local mosque (Sotūda, p. 564). Their religious leaders are called *išān* (yi-chan; lit



“they,” used to show respect). Believers from a particular household often follow one *išān* and his successors. Upon a man’s death his property is often divided equally among his sons. If he dies away from home, his body must be brought back for religious burial.

The Tajiks in Sinkiang possess a rich store of folk tales, poetry, music, dances, ceremonials, and crafts. Their cultural heritage is rooted both in the traditions of the Pamirs and in the rich Persian past of Central Asia; it has also been influenced by the neighboring Turkish culture. In the past the literature of the Tajiks was predominantly oral, but since the spread of public education under the People’s Republic of China they have developed a written literature. Because official teaching is in Uighur, however, educated Tajiks generally write in that language and script.

The Tajik peasants around Yarkand, Poskam, and Khaqilik sing traditional Tajik melodies with Uighur words. In the past early marriage and marriage between cousins were common. Wedding ceremonies often last three days and usually includes singing, dancing, and the game of *oqlaq tartiřmak* (*diao-yang*). Other Tajik celebrations include the spring festival Qie-to-qia-te-er (“to clean away dust”), the planting festival Tai-he-mu-zi-wa-si-to, and Zi-wan-er (festival of repairing canals and irrigation channels).

Tajik males greet each other by shaking hands or embracing. A younger woman kisses the palm of an older woman, while the older one kisses her cheeks and eyes. Women of the same generation usually kiss each other on the cheek.

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