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EASTERN TURKISTAN**

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INTRODUCTION

The motherland of the Turkic people is Turkestan. The name "Turkestan" is Iranian in origin; the term which means "The Land of the Turkic People", dates back to 7th century. (1)

The western part of Turkestan was gradually conquered by Tsarist Russia in 1865; it then became known as Western Turkestan. After the formation of the USSR in 1922, Western Turkestan was divided into five republics called Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.

The eastern part of Turkestan was invaded by the Manchu rulers of China in 1876. Subsequently, it was called Eastern Turkestan, Sinkiang or Sinkiang Uygur Autonomous region.

AREA OF EASTERN TURKESTAN

The area of Eastern Turkestan is 1.6 million square kilometers, which constitutes about one-sixth of the total area of China, including Chinese colonies like Tibet and Inner Mongolia.

Eastern Turkestan borders on Western Turkestan in the north-west ; the Mongolian Peoples in the Northeast, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in the Southwest; and Tibet in the South and Northwest China in the East.

POPULATION

The latest Chinese census gives the present population of Eastern Turkestan as slightly over 13 million (2). Of these, the Uygurs are 6 million, Kazakhs 1 million, Kirghiz 150 thousand, Uzbeks 15 thousand, Tatars 5 thousand, Tajiks 30 thousand, Huis 600 thousand, Mongols 150 thousand, ethnic Manchus 90 thousand and the remainder of the population are Chinese.

ECONOMY

Eastern Turkestan is a very rich country in uranium, platinum, gold, silver, iron, lead, copper, sulphur, tin, mica, emeralds, coal and petroleum.

RELIGION

The various Turkic peoples living in Eastern Turkestan, the Uygurs, Kazakhs, Kirghiz, Uzbeks, Tatars, and ethnically Indo-European Tajiks and ethnically Chinese Huis are all Muslims. These Muslims constitute more than half of the Muslim population of China.

It was during the reign of Satuk Bughra Khan, the Karakhanid ruler, that the people of Eastern Turkestan began embracing Islam in 934 A.D. He took the Muslim name Andulkarim, thus becoming Abdulkarim Satuk Bughra Khan. Abdulkarim Satuk Bughra Khan was the first Turkic ruler who embraced Islam in Central Asia (3).

After embracing Islam, the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan founded an extensive Islamic civilization in that area. Hundreds of Mosques, Madrassas and libraries were built. The Idgan Mosque built in Kashgar can accomodate 15 thousand Muslims (4). In Kashgar alone there were 6 Madrassas (5). Hundreds of students came to study in these Madrassas from foreign countries (6). The Mesud-i Library in Kashgar had a collection of almost 200 thousand books (7).

In this period hundreds of Islamic scholars, also well known in the Islamic world, emerged. Hundreds of valuable books were written. 150 of these important works were discovered later. Some of these books are in Leningard Museum (8). Among these works, the Turkic Muslim scholar Yusuf has Hajip's book entitled Kutat-ku Bilik, Mahmud Kashgari's Divan-i Lughat-it Turk, Ahmet Yukneki's Atabetul Hakayik are world famous.

It was in this period that the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan adopted the Arabic Script.

Imam Hussein Halef of Kashgar was the first Turkic Muslim in Eastern Turkestan who translated the meaning of the Holy Quran into the Turkic language in the 12th century (9).

This Islamic civilization evolved in Eastern Turkestan also gave birth to great Islamic scholars and writers, such as Imam Bukhari, Tirmizi, Semerqandi, Biruni, Farabi, Ibn-i Sina, Abu Mashhari, Zimahshari, Ulughbeck and Alishir Nevai.

This Turkic Muslim power, prestige and civilization which dominated Central Asia for all almost one thousand years went into a steep decline after the Manchu invasion of Eastern Turkestan.

POLITICAL HISTORY

From 210 B.C. on, Eastern Turkestan was within the borders of various Turkic Dynasties such as Hun (220 B.C. - 386 A.D.), Tabghach (386-534), Kokturk (552-744), Uygur (744-840), Karakhanid (840-1124), and the Turkic-Mongol (1218-1749).

The Chinese, seizing opportunities created by the occasional weakening of such states, launched six major invasions of Eastern Turkestan in 104 B.C., 59 B.C., 73 A.D., 448 A.D., 657 A.D., and 744 A.D. But these invasaions achieved no permanent success (10).

The Manchus who set up a huge empire in China, invaded Eastern Turkestan in 1759, and dominated it until 1862. During this period the

Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan revolted 42 times against the Manchu rulers of China (11). In the last revolt of 1863, the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan were successful in expelling the Manchus from their motherland, and founded an independent state under the leadership of Yakub Beg Badavlat, which lasted for 16 years.

Fearing Tsarist Russian expansion into Eastern Turkestan, Great Britain persuaded the Manchu court to conquer Eastern Turkestan again. The money for the Manchu invasion forces was granted by British banks (12).

Large forces under the overall command of General Zho Zhung Tang attacked Eastern Turkestan in 1876. After this invasion, Eastern Turkestan was given the name Sinkiang, and it was annexed to the territory of the Manchu empire on 18 November 1884 (13).

In 1911, the Nationalist Chinese, under the leadership of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, overthrew Manchu rule in China and established a republic.

The Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan, who also wanted to free themselves from foreign domination, staged several uprisings against the Nationalist Chinese rule during this period. Twice, in 1933 and 1944 the Turkic Muslims were successful in setting up an independent Eastern Turkestan Republic (14). But these independent republics were overthrown by the military intervention and political intrigues of the Soviet Union.

In 1949 the Nationalist Chinese were defeated by the Chinese Communists. After that, Eastern Turkestan fell under Chinese communist rule. The Nationalist Chinese forces in Eastern Turkestan surrendered the country without firing a single bullet. But thousands of Turkic Muslims fought the Chinese Communist invasion forces until recent years.

PERSECUTION OF THE TURKIC MUSLIMS IN EASTERN TURKESTAN

The Chinese Communists after occupying Eastern Turkestan pursued a policy of systematically persecuting the Turkic Muslims of this country. The signs of this policy of persecution can be clearly seen in the cultural, socio-economic and religious aims of the Chinese Communists practiced in Eastern Turkestan.

Under the pretext of "cultural reform" the Chinese Communists eliminated the traditional Arabic script which the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan had been using for almost one thousand years. Instead, a Latin alphabet was adopted to suit the Chinese phonology (15). Further steps were taken to introduce Chinese words and expressions (16). Under the pretext of "remnants of the past", 370 thousand books written in Arabic script, including the Holy Koran, Hadith and other religious works were destroyed (17).

Under the pretext of "socio-economic reform", the Chinese Communists drove 96.6 of the Turkic Muslims into 30 thousand communes, aiming to

turn them into animal herds, to destroy their Islamic family bonds, which were considered sacred by the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan (18). In the communes, the Turkic Muslims were forced to share their rooms, kitchen and cooking pots with the Chinese settlers. Halal food and haram food were prepared in the same kitchen and cooked in the same pots. The Turkic Muslims were forced to marry Chinese. 30-40 percent of all children now born in Eastern Turkestan come from these mixed marriages (19).

The Chinese Communist's campaign against Islam was particularly severe. The Chinese Communists started by confiscating the land and properties of Waqif under the pretext of "land reform" in an attempt to cut off the financial sources of Islam and force it to cease all religious activities due to lack of funds (20). After confiscating the land and properties of waqif, the Chinese Communists infused politics into them by ordering the Turkic Muslims to put up Mao Zedong's portrait in the Mosques and assigning Communist cadres to propagate Communism at the time of holding religious services (21). Most of the Mosques in Eastern Turkestan used to have their primary schools for the children of the Turkic Muslims. These schools were one of the important facilities for teaching Islam to the Turkic Muslim children. Under the pretext of "unification of national education", they shut all the schools operated under the Mosques and required the children of the Turkic Muslims to transfer to other primary schools where Marxism, Leninism and Maoism were taught (22). Using the pretext that attendance of Mosques and Islamic gatherings and Koran recitations "hindered production", the Chinese Communists prohibited the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan from fulfilling their religious duties (22). Throughout Eastern Turkestan more than 29 thousand Mosques were closed and turned into barracks, stables, slaughter-houses etc. (23). More than 54 thousand Imams were arrested, tortured, used for forced labor, cleaning sewers, and forced to care for pigs, slaughtering them and eating pork (24).

The reason for this particularly severe attack by the Chinese Communists on Islam is that it was regarded as a major obstacle to the Chinese Communist's policy of assimilating the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan. Ethnic groups living under the threat of losing their national identity tend to have stronger feelings of nationalism. Islam is the national identity of the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan. Islam encompasses not only a corpus of directly religious beliefs and rites, but also a complex aggregate of cultural, psychological and social traditions, attitudes, and customs governing the whole way of life of the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan.

Those Turkic peoples who chose religions other than Islam, all lost their national identity. For example, the Hazars, Bulgars, the Kumans, the Pecheneks etc., were all Turkic peoples. But they all lost their national identity, after choosing religions other than Islam. The Bulgars, once an ethnic Turkic people, are now trying to assimilate the Muslim Turks under their rule.

Like all communist countries, the Chinese Communists also fear Islam, because they regard Islam as a major obstacle to the assimilation of the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan. Unless they exterminate Islam totally, they cannot assimilate the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan. This is the reason why the Chinese Communists waged a merciless war of extermination against Islam in Eastern Turkestan.

In order to defend their country, to uphold their belief and to preserve their national identity, the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan staged 58 major revolts against the Chinese Communists in the years 1949-1951; 1954-1958; 1959-1963 and 1965-1968 (25).

Between the years 1950-1972, of the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan, who stood up to defend their legitimate rights, 360 thousand were executed (26), more than 100 thousand fled to neighbouring countries (27) and more than 500 thousand were driven into 10 of the 19 hard-labor concentration camps in Eastern Turkestan (28).

It is true that there has been a measure of liberalization affecting the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan during the rule of the new Chinese leaders who took over after the death of Mao Zedong.

This liberalization has occurred mostly in the fields of economic, cultural and religious life.

But it appears that all these measures of liberalization put into effect after the death of Mao Zedong are still beyond satisfying the Turkic Muslims, because many armed clashes are reported to have taken place in the cities of Eastern Turkestan since 1979 (20).

These clashes also gave rise to disputes among the Chinese and Turkic Muslim leaders (30).

The reasons for these clashes, unrest and disputes in Eastern Turkestan have their roots in the desire of Turkic Muslims for self-determination. The Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan demand that the Chinese Communists fulfill the promise they made before coming to power in China.

The Provisional Constitution of the Chinese Communists, approved by the First All-China Congress of Workers and Peasants Deputies in 1931, proclaimed :

"In such regions as Mongolia, Tibet and Sinkiang ... the nationalities have the right to determine themselves whether they want to secede from the Chinese Soviet Republic and form their own independent states, or join the Union, or to form autonomous regions within the Chinese Soviet Republic." (31).

At the Seventh Congress in 1945, Mao Zedong, in his report on Coalition Government, denounced the Kuomintang's oppressive policies as those of great power chauvinism, said that the Communists fully endorse Sun Yat

Sen's position on the nationality problem, which was to grant them "self determination after the communist takeover in China (32).

But after seizing power in China, the Chinese Communists denied their "self-determination" promises. Instead, the Chinese Communists decided to form "autonomous regions", "autonomous provinces" and "autonomous counties" within the territories of Eastern Turkestan with the promise to grant "equality" to the ethnic groups living in that country.

At present Eastern Turkestan is called an "autonomous region". But in reality no right of self-government is granted to the Turkic Muslims. The reins of government are completely in the hands of the Chinese.

To quote an example, the correspondent of the West German magazine Der Spiegel, in an article published in November 1983, writes the following :

"Although most of the important posts in Sinkiang are occupied by the Uygurs, it was not difficult to discern within few minutes that the real bosses are the Chinese. Any Uygur head of an office, while speaking with a foreigner, would look into the eyes of his ever-present assistant to determine if he was saying the right thing."

These words are conclusive proof that the Chinese are still following the age-old policy of "giving the office but not the authority.

Putting self-rule aside, today, the long promised "equality" in the true sense has not been established among the Chinese and the Turkic Muslims in Eastern Turkestan.

For instance, if a Chinese and a Turkic Muslim quarrel, it is usually the Turkic Muslim who is punished. The objective is to intimidate the Turkic Muslim. In areas where judges, prosecutors and chiefs of police are Turkic Muslims, they avoid punishing a Chinese who is involved in a quarrel with a Turkic Muslim, so as not to be stamped as a "nationalist". If a Turkic Muslim, director manager or chairman has made a decision which is in favour of his people, and if the decision is not in interest of the Chinese, this director, manager or chairman is removed from his position with a "promotion" and sent to Peking for further education untill he is "qualified" for the new job. All white collar jobs are offered to the Chinese. Blue collar jobs for the Turkic Muslims. There are 350 people working in a big hotel in Urumchi, the capital city of Eastern Turkestan. Only 35 of them are Turkic Muslims, the rest are Chinese. In a big department store in Urumchi there are 84 employees, only 15 of which are Turkic Muslims, the rest are Chinese. At a textile plant near Urumchi only ten percent of the workers are Turkic Muslims. Throughout Eastern Turkestan the same situation exists. There is no unemployment among the Chinese settlers in Eastern Turkestan. Among the Turkic Muslims the unemployment rate is very high.

The new Chinese leaders claim that importance has been given to education, but the number of illiterates is still very high in Eastern Turkestan (33).

Only 26 percent of the teachers in higher educational institutions in Eastern Turkestan are Turkic Muslims (34). The rest are Chinese. All school textbooks used in higher educational institutions are in Chinese. Graduates from local language schools have difficulty passing higher educational institutions examinations, because the examination papers are in Chinese. This has forced the Turkic Muslim parents who wanted to give better education to their children to get them admitted from the very beginning in Chinese-medium primary schools where the education is imparted entirely in Chinese. Unfortunately, the young persons completing their education in the Chinese schools are unable to articulate their mother tongue correctly, and in case of speaking it, they fail to convey the meaning and continuously use the Chinese words to express themselves. By forgetting their traditions and customs they generally behave like the Chinese, and thereby, cause strong negative reactions among the Turkic Muslims.

The new Chinese leaders claim that literary freedom has been introduced, but the Turkic Muslims still lack a modern literature. Only 16 % of all publications in Eastern Turkestan are in Turkic Muslim language (35).

The Latin alphabet prepared in accordance with the Chinese phonology was replaced by the Arabic alphabet. But the re-introduction of the Arabic alphabet has placed under great strains tens of thousands of Turkic Muslims who have received their education in the Latin alphabet for the past 20 years. These Turkic Muslims are now obliged to re-learn the Arabic script, otherwise they will not be able to follow even the daily newspapers which are published in Arabic script. Although evening classes were organized to teach the Arabic alphabet, the effort has not been much of a success so far.

Eastern Turkestan is a very rich country. But the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan still live at a bare subsistence level. The Chinese Communists transport to China all the products of Eastern Turkestan including horses, ponies and donkeys.

The Pakistani writer Mohammad Rafik, wrote the following in his book entitled : Islam in China, published in 1963 :

".... Communist China, after occupying Eastern Turkestan, made the Turkic Muslims of this country labor more for the Chinese than to meet their own needs ..."

The same situation exists today.

The new Chinese leaders claim that they have allowed the Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan to conduct some private business to enable them to improve their living standards. Those who have a little bit of capital can now run a private business, but there are very few who are benefitting from private business because of the dearth of capital for investment.

When contrasted with the outright repression of the Mao Zedong period, the current religious policy of the new Chinese leaders looks almost liberal.

According to the Chinese sources since 1979, almost 14 thousand Mosques have been opened in Eastern Turkestan (36), 15 thousand Imams have been allowed to preach Islam (37), and almost 150 thousand copies of the Holy Koran have been published (38).

The meaning of the Holy Koran has been translated into Turkic language (39), Islamic institutes have been opened (40), and almost thousand pilgrims from Eastern Turkestan were given permission to perform Hajj last year (41).

All this is for the better. However, the new Chinese leaders still view religion as a negative force in China, as conveyed in Document NO. 19 entitled "Concerning our Country's Basic Standpoint on Religious Questions During the Socialist Period", and circulated by the Chinese Communist Party Central committee in March 1982 to Party Committees across the country. The opening statement of the text of the document is uncompromising :

In human history, religion will ultimately disappear, and there will come an era when the vast majority of the citizens of our country will be able consciously to adopt a scientific outlook towards the world and life, and will no longer need to look for spiritual support from the illussory world of gods. This utopia, as described by Marx, Engels and Mao, is the magnificent goal which our entire party should strive hard to achieve, generation after generation (42).

In the eyes of the CCP, religion in China has a bad pedigree. Document NO. 19 states :

During the prolonged period of feudal society and the centuries long period of semi-feudal and semi-colonial society, all the religions in our country, generally speaking, were controlled and used by the ruling class and made to play a major negative role.

In Communist China even today it is clear that the CCP assumes the right to control religious believers, and genuine religious freedom is unthinkable. Officially recognized patriotic religious organizations

play a crucial role in the structure of CCP control of religious believers. At present there are eight such national organizations. In Document NO. 19, the basic task of these organizations at all levels is defined :

To assist the Party and government in carrying out the policy of freedom of religious believers, and the personalities of the religious circles continuously to raise their patriotic and socialist awareness, to represent the legitimate rights and interests of religious believers, to organize and lead the masses of religious believers in carrying out the normal religious activities ... All the religious organizations should obey the leadership of the party and the government.

In this statement attention should be given to the phrase "normal religious activities". In the new constitution, which was adopted in December 1982, Article 36 on religious affairs also asserts that "the State protects normal religious activities". In principle, however, only those activities supervised by the patriotic religious associations are regarded by the government as legitimate, and those which are carried out independently do not enjoy the State's protection and still incur reprisals. Therefore, private religious instruction, to propagate religion among the people and the teaching of religion to children under 18 is prohibited (43).

When the decision of the CCP was made in 1979 to resurrect the religious associations, most of the available leaders were elderly. The chronic shortage of leadership has made the training of younger religious leaders a priority. The students who are to go to religious training schools are chosen by the party. But their primary task is to uphold the party's policy rather than serve religious objectives. Documents NO. 19 states :

The task of the religious colleges is to train a rank of young professional religious workers who politically love the motherland, support the party's leadership and the socialist system and who are fairly accomplished in religious learning. All young religious professional workers should continually raise their cultural level and religious knowledge, and loyally uphold the party's religious policy.

The CCP recognizes that Christianity, Buddhism and Islam, which are important religions in China, also have an important place internationally. As in other communist countries, religion is regarded as useful in promoting political ends.

Documents No. 19 states:

At present further along with the daily increase in our international exchanges, the external contacts of our religious circles are also increasing daily and play an important role in expanding our country's political influence.

In conclusion it can be said that the Chinese who came to "liberate" Eastern Turkestan 35 years ago, have done nothing whatsoever during this time for the benefit of the Turkic Muslims in Eastern Turkestan.

All these years the Chinese Communists pursued a policy of systematically persecuting the Turkic Muslims, eliminating their culture and exterminating their religion.

The cultural, economic and religious freedoms introduced by the new Chinese leaders are nothing but a show-case for the Islamic world.

The Chinese Communist Party, in principle, remains hostile to Islam. The new Chinese leaders recognized that outright repression of Islam did not work during Mao Zedong's period, and in principle the use of force is eschewed for the time being. The new Chinese leaders are aware that they must avoid needlessly offending international opinion. However, the danger of assimilation of the Turkic Muslims, elimination of their culture and extermination of Islam still exists.

Prior to the Chinese Communists there were only 200 thousand Chinese settlers in Eastern Turkestan. Today there are more than 5 million. The Chinese military personnel stationed in Eastern Turkestan are excluded from this figure. They still keep coming. Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, in a recent speech said that Eastern Turkestan could easily absorb 200 million Chinese settlers (44). This is the ultimate aim of the Chinese Communists. The Turkic Muslims of Eastern Turkestan are under great fear that they will be overwhelmed by such a large number of Chinese settlers and lose their national identity.

If we survey the Nationalist Chinese, Western and Islamic sources, we will see that there were more than 50 million Muslims in China prior to the Chinese Communist takeover in 1949. But the Chinese Communist sources now indicate that there are only 15 million Muslims in China. Nobody knows what happened to the rest of these Muslims. Today, more

than half of China's Muslims live in Eastern Turkestan. If we don't want to speculate about the whereabouts of these Muslims in a couple of years, the Islamic world must immediately take necessary steps to protect the assimilation of the Turkic Muslims in Eastern Turkestan and in China as a whole.

NOTES

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