

Liang began to decline about 1915 and in 1920 he died, partly from chagrin at the growing influence of Ma Ch'i.

The Mohammedans of Kansu are believed to have come from Samarkand about the 8th century A.D. They gradually adopted Chinese customs though retaining their old religion. About a hundred years later the Salars also came from Samarkand and settled round Sun-hwa on the Yellow River to the west of Lan-chow. Being more remote they retained most of their Turkish customs.

Ma Ch'i had a certain number of regular troops but depended chiefly on his raw levies. Each village when called on had to provide a couple of men, and the village had to pay their families for a substitute to work in the fields and also provide the soldier with a horse if he was a cavalry soldier and a rifle and two hundred rounds. These levies were quite untrained but were of good fighting material.

Pereira gives an interesting account of Ma Ch'i's methods in fighting the Goloks, a Tibetan tribe who had hitherto never been conquered. Ma Ch'i sent Mohammedan and Chinese traders among them to act as spies. When the time was ripe for attack he called out his levies, of whom 20 per cent were buglers. But he did not attempt to attack the Tibetans: he simply made his buglers blow, while with some old Krupp guns he fired at the rocks; and the noise of the bugles and the guns and shock of the shells on the rocks so terrified the Goloks that they fled. Ma Ch'i then pursued them and slew them in large numbers.