

ranges, and of sand in the interior, which eastward accumulates into ranges of shifting sand hills. Though the air is of exceeding dryness and rain is rare, the amount of water which flows down from the snowy mountains on three sides of this valley must be considerable. The rivers carrying this, drain into the central channel of the Ergol or Tarym, which is absorbed by Lake Lop on the eastern verge of the tract, and has no further outlet, except in the legends of the Chinese which connect it by subterranean issues with the Hoang Ho. The lateral rivers afford irrigation, and patches of more or less fertile soil border the bases of the three ranges, in which cities have risen, and settled states have existed from time immemorial. Similar oases perhaps once existed nearer the centre of the plain, where Marco Polo places the city of Lop, and across which a direct road once led from the Chinese frontier to Khotan.<sup>1</sup> From Khotan, as from the western cities of Kashgar and Yarkand, the only communication with China now followed seems to lie through the towns that are dotted along the base of the Thian Shan.<sup>2</sup>

Chinese scholars date the influence of the empire in the more westerly of these states from the second century B.C. In the first century after our era they were thoroughly subjected, and the Chinese power extended even beyond the Bolor to the shores of the Caspian. The Chinese authority was subject to considerable fluctuations, but under the Thang in the seventh century we find the country east of the mountains again under Chinese governors, (whose seats are indicated as Bishbalik, Khotan, Karashahr, and Kashgar,)<sup>3</sup> till the decay of that dynasty in the latter part of the ninth century, and those divisions of the empire which followed, and endured till the conquest of all its sub-divisions by Chinghiz and his successors. These latter held supremacy, actual or nominal, over Eastern Turkestan as part of the early conquests of their house. They fell in China, and their Chinese successors

<sup>1</sup> This road is said to have been abandoned on account of the Kalmak banditti who haunted it. It seems to have been followed, as an exceptional case, by Shah Rukh's ambassadors on their return from China (see *Not. et Extraits*, xiv, Pt. i, p. 425; also p. 476).

<sup>2</sup> Chiefly derived from *Russians in Central Asia*.

<sup>3</sup> *Pauthier, Chine Ancienne*, p. 296.