

water, or rather ice, sufficient to provide us all on a seven days' march across waterless desert north of the Lop-nor marshes, and then during a prolonged stay at the ruins as well as on the return journey. The problem looked indeed formidable when I found that, by exhausting all local resources, I only could raise the number of camels to twenty-one, including my own and six animals hired from Charchan. It would have been still more complicated had I not been able to reckon upon the small fishermen's hamlet at Abdal, near where the waters of the Tarim empty themselves into the Lop marshes, as a convenient depot. There I could leave behind all baggage and supplies not immediately needed, as well as our ponies, *à cheval* as it were, on the desert route to Tun-huang.

Fortunately Liao Ta-lao-ye, the Chinese magistrate of this forlorn district (Fig. 109), counting in all between four and five hundred homesteads, proved most attentive and helpful. When on the morning after my arrival I called upon him in his modest Ya-mên transformed from a local Bai's house, I was received with an *empressement* which betokened not merely deference to my Tao-t'ai friend and patron, but personal goodwill and interest. Liao was a slightly built man of about thirty-five, with pleasant and refined features of a typical Chinese cast. His charge was more of an exile, and an unprofitable one in addition, than that of any Chinese official of his rank I had yet met. So the state reception was simple enough, two Turki villagers, disguised as executioners in long red gabardines, being the chief *figurants*, besides a Chinese clerical attendant and the Begs escorting me.

But I had not long been seated on the Amban's left, upon the chair of honour, in his cosy and neatly kept small living-room, before I was struck very pleasantly by my host's remarkably well-bred manners and quiet air of authority. With the help of Chiang-ssü-yeh, ever the liveliest *causeur* on such occasions and a true fountain-head of genealogical knowledge in regard to every Chinese dignitary of the 'New Dominions,' I soon discovered that Liao was a younger brother of Liu-chi Ta-jên whom I had met in 1901 as Amban of Yarkand. The intelligent grand-