

descent towards Kan-chou, I came upon small camps of what I took on my rapid passage to be half-Chinified Mongols, grazing cattle and ponies on the forest-girt uplands between the Cha-ho and Li-yüan Ho.¹¹ I was struck at the time by the fact that their number and that of their herds seemed distinctly small as compared with the available grazing and the manifold advantages of the ground, and also by what I may call the general 'tameness' of their ways. But the true explanation of their presence here, and of the exception which it appeared to form to the conditions imposed by Chinese border policy on this ground, became clear to me only later from a very interesting publication of Colonel (now General) C. G. E. Mannerheim, the distinguished Finnish officer.¹² This showed me that these were the summer camps of a small and now rapidly dwindling tribe, calling themselves Shera Yögurs and speaking a Mongol dialect, whom the Chinese administration of the seven centh century had purposely transplanted to the Kan-su border from 'outside the Wall' in order to provide itself with useful 'barbarian' auxiliaries against Dzungar inroads from the north-west. The Shera Yögurs consider themselves closely related to the still smaller community of the Sarö Yögurs. These undoubtedly speak a Turkish tongue and are scattered in a few pastoral settlements over the grazing grounds of the sandy steppe which, as Map No. 91. B-D. 2-3 shows, stretches south of the Su-chou-Kan-chou high road, between Shuang-ching-tzü and the Kao-t'ai oasis.^{12a}

Pastoral
tribes at
north foot of
Nan-shan.

For the origin, racial characteristics, and present conditions of these small tribes, it must suffice to refer to General Mannerheim's valuable ethnographic publication. What interests us here is that they afford an instructive modern illustration of a process which is likely to have occurred more than once since the Chinese Empire, in the interest of its Central-Asian policy, took possession of this 'passage land', as Ritter has long ago rightly called it,¹³ along the foot of the snowy Nan-shan. We have direct evidence of this process in a Chinese historical notice which, though it relates to the tenth century, helps to throw interesting light also on the conditions here prevailing in a much earlier period. Kao Chü-hui, when describing the journey along this border of the Chinese mission which started for Khotan in A. D. 938, tells us: 'From Liang-chou, going 500 li westwards, one arrives at Kan-chou. Kan-chou is the camping-place of the Hui-ho (Uigurs). The mountains which are about a hundred li to the south are the territory where, in the time of the Han dynasty, there resided the ancient people called the Little Yüeh-chih. There is a race different from this people, called *Sha-t'o* from the mountain of the deer forest; they are said to be descended from the Ch'u-yüeh race.'¹⁴

Ancient
settlements
of Little
Yüeh-chih.

The Sha-t'o 沙陀 to whom Kao Chü-hui's relation refers here were a tribe of the Western Turks, first settled in early T'ang times to the east of Barkul, and after A. D. 808 transferred to the northern borders of Kan-su for the sake of protecting them from inroads.¹⁵ Their mention here by

Sha-t'o tribe
once settled
on Kan-su
border.

¹¹ See Map No. 94. A. 1, 2; *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 330 sq. In extenuation of my error in taking these people for Mongols, I may note that on no occasion did we actually halt close to their camps, and that being Lamaists, and speaking only Mongol besides Chinese, they were readily taken by my Turkī followers for 'Kalmaks', i.e. Mongols. I myself had up to that time never met Mongols, and was, therefore, the more easily deceived about the origin of these people whom we unexpectedly encountered.

¹² See C. G. E. Mannerheim, *A visit to the Sarö and Shera Yögurs*, from the *Journal de la Société Finno-Ougrienne*, xxvii, Helsingfors.

^{12a} Cf. regarding the origin and language of the Shera Yögurs, Mannerheim, *loc. cit.*, pp. 31 sqq.: regarding their

traditional connexion with the Sarö Yögurs, *ibid.*, pp. 6, 33 sq.; for the Sarö Yögurs and their Turkish language, pp. 5 sqq., 61 sqq.

¹³ Cf. Ritter, *Asien*, ii. pp. 195 sqq.

¹⁴ Cf. Rémusat, *Ville de Khotan*, p. 76.

¹⁵ About the history of the Sha-t'o, a tribe closely allied with the Ch'u-yüeh, cf. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, pp. 96 sq., 272. I take the reference to their later habitat on the Kan-su borders from Ritter, *Asien*, ii. p. 212, who quotes Gaubil, *Histoire de Tang*, xvi. p. 156, a work not accessible to me at present.

I do not know what locality may be meant by the 'mountain of the deer forest'. Can a portion of the Eastern T'ien-shan be intended?

For the part played by the Sha-t'o in the troubled times