

people resembled Ch'iu-tzū (Kuchā) and its people, but the spoken language differed a little. The fine cloth and serge of the district were esteemed by the neighbouring countries. There were some tens of monasteries with above a thousand Brethren.⁹

Position
of Ak-su.

If we compare this short account of Ak-su with the detailed description which Hsüan-tsang devotes to Kuchā or Khotan, and its number of Buddhist monks with the five thousand he attributes to either of these kingdoms,¹⁰ it is easy to realize that Ak-su was in his time a territory of far less importance and resources. With this accords what the Later Han Annals, the *Wei lio*, and the T'ang Annals indicate about the dependence of Ku-mo on Kuchā,¹¹ and the same observation still holds good at the present day. What importance Ak-su may claim nowadays as a commercial and administrative centre is due, not to its local produce or industries, far inferior to those of Kuchā, but mainly to the advantages which are assured to the district and its 'Old Town' by their geographical position. At Ak-su the great trade route through the northern oases of the Tārīm Basin from Kara-shahr to Kāshgar is crossed by others almost as important leading to the great fertile valleys north of the T'ien-shan. From Ak-su there leads due north the much-frequented route across the Muz-art Pass, which connects the Tārīm Basin with the Ili valley and the trade emporium of Kulja. Up the valley of the Tushkan-daryā and past Uch-Turfān lies the route which crosses the Bedel Pass and thence gives access, on the one side to the valleys around Lake Issik-kul, and on the other to the headwaters of the Yaxartes and to Farghāna, always amongst the lands most coveted by Central-Asian conquerors. The same factors which make Ak-su town nowadays a busy place of trade exchange and caravan traffic must have been equally at work in Han times when the great kingdom of the Wu-sun was established in the valleys northward, and later when all the mountains and the plains beyond were held by the Western Turks, whose paramount Khān Hsüan-tsang proceeded to visit near Tokmak after leaving Po-lu-chia, or Ak-su.¹² It is scarcely necessary to explain that the same geographical reasons must have always invested Ak-su with considerable strategic and political importance. There can be little doubt about their having primarily determined the selection of Ak-su as headquarters for the Tao-t'ai whom the Chinese established here with a (nominally) strong garrison after the reconquest of the New Dominion in 1877.¹³

Ethno-
graphy of
Ak-su
district.

The thought naturally suggests itself that geographical relations such as these could not have remained without their influence also upon the ethnography of the district. Exposure to inroads from the north may here, as in the parallel case of Kara-shahr, account both for the mixed character of the population and for the inadequate cultivation in spite of ample irrigation resources. But I lack the materials for following up this question here further. It must suffice to point out that the manifold changes in the name of the district to which I had occasion to call attention above may have, partly at least, had their origin in successive variations of the ethnic composition of the people.

⁹ Cf. Watters, *Yuan Chwang*, i. p. 64; Julien, *Mémoires*, i. p. 10.

The reference to the 'fine cloth and serge of the district' is borne out by the fame which the woven rugs, horse-cloths, etc., of Ak-su still enjoy throughout the Tārīm Basin. They are manufactured mainly by the Kirghiz in the mountains, but the trade is centred in the 'Old Town' of Ak-su. For cotton goods carried from Ak-su to Kulja, see the Russian report of 1811 reproduced by Ritter, *Asien*, ii. p. 411.

¹⁰ Cf. Julien, *Mémoires*, i. 4; ii. p. 224.

¹¹ See Chavannes, *T'oung-pao*, 1905, p. 554; *ib.*, 1906, pp. 226, 231, 233, 252, 256; *Turcs occid.*, p. 83, note 2.

¹² Cf. Chavannes, *Turcs occid.*, p. 264.

¹³ It was then that the Yangi-shahr or 'New Town' of Ak-su was built as the Chinese headquarters and stronghold seven miles to the south of the 'Old Town'. Trade and traffic have remained at the latter. It is likely that the abundant water-supply of Ak-su and the consequent possibility of extending cultivation for the maintenance of a garrison were contributory reasons for the selection of Ak-su.

I may note here that on my way from the Tārīm I passed below Matan (Map No. 24. B. 3) the sadly neglected lands of what was to have been a 'military agricultural colony', apparently on the lines of the early Chinese model of Han times.