

NOTE 1 In its historical application the term Central Asia designates an area that is considerably larger than the heartland of the Asian continent. Were it not for the awkwardness of the term, it would be better to speak of Central Eurasia, comprising all those parts of the huge Eurasian landmass that did not develop a distinctive sedentary civilization of their own. But the real boundaries of Central Asia are determined at any given time in history by the relationships between the "civilized" and the "barbarian" - the two opposed but complementary. The equation so often propounded - of the civilized with the sedentary and the barbarian with the nomad - is misleading, however. The most significant distinction between the two groups in Eurasia lies probably in the successful attempt of the civilized to alter and command the physical environment, whereas the barbarian simply uses it, often in a masterly fashion, to gain an advantage. In its essence, the history of Central Asia is that of the barbarian, and its dominant feature is the sometimes latent, sometimes open conflict in which the barbarian clashes with the civilized. Two basic patterns of conquest are evident in the history of Central Asia; that of the barbarian, accomplished with arms and ephemeral in its results, and that of the civilized - slow, rather unspectacular, achieved through technological superiority and absorption.

The principal difficulty for the historian of Central Asia lies in the paucity and relative lateness of indigenous written sources. The first aboriginal sources - written in a Turkic language - date from the 8th century CE, and source material of similar value does not become available again until the 13th century. Most of the written sources dealing with Central Asia originate in the surrounding sedentary civilizations and are almost always strongly prejudiced against the barbarian; the most important among them are in Chinese, Greek, Latin, Arabic and Persian.

Without a sufficient number of indigenous written sources, the language of a given Central Asian people is difficult to determine. It is, however, reasonable to suppose that many of them spoke a Uralic or an Altaic language, and it can be taken for certain that Paleo-Asiatic languages were in wider use in early times than they are now. While it seems likely that the principal languages of many great nomadic empires were Turkic or Mongol, the attribution of such languages to peoples about whose speech insufficient linguistic evidence exists - as in the case of the Hsiung-nu or the Avars - is unwarranted; it is wiser to confess ignorance.

Two of the natural vegetation zones of Central Asia have played a prominent part in history; the forest belt, 500 to 1,000 miles (800 to 1,600 km) wide, and, south of it, the steppe, a vast grassland extending eastward from Hungary to Mongolia, facilitating communications and providing grass, the only raw material absolutely essential to the creation of the great nomad empires. The northern frozen marshes and the southern deserts played a minor role in Central Asian history.

Within the broad concept of Central Asia as defined above, there is in terms of historical geography a more precisely delineated Central Asian heartland consisting of three adjacent regions, collectively referred to by 19th-century explorers and geographers as Russian and Chinese Turkestan.

The first of these regions, known to the ancient Greeks as Transoxiana and to the Arabs as Mawara'an-Nahr ("That Which Lies Beyond the River"), consists of the area between the Amu Darya (the Oxus River of the Greeks and the Jayhun of the Arabs) and Syr Darya (the Jaxartes River of the Greeks and the Sayhun of the Arabs). It is an arid, semi-desert country where, before the development of large-scale irrigation projects in the 20th century, the sedentary population maintained itself by intensive cultivation of the fertile tracts bordering the Amu Darya and the Syr Darya or by cultivation of the oases, in which were situated the major urban centers such as Bukhara and Samarkand.

The second, predominantly steppe, region extends northward from the upper reaches of the Syr Darya to the valley of the Ili River and to the foothills of the ranges lying between the Altai Mountains and the Tien Shan. Bounded on the south by the line of the Tien Shan and to the north by Lake Balkhash, this area was known to the Turks and the Yeti Su, the "Land of the Seven Rivers," hence its Russian name of Semirechye.

The third region, centering on the Takla Makan Desert, is bounded on the north by the Tien Shan, on the west by the Pamirs, on the south by the Kunlun Mountains and on the northeast by the Dzungarian (Jungarian) Basin. Often referred to as Kashgaria, from its principal urban center, Kashgar (K'a-shih), the region is characterized by small oasis settlements lying between the desert and the surrounding ranges, such as Khotan (Ho-t'ien), Yarkand, Kashgar itself, and Aksu (A-k'o-su), which served as way stations on the famous Silk Road between China and the West.

NOTE 2 Timur never assumed openly the full attributes of sovereignty, contenting himself with the title of emir while upholding the fictional authority of a series of puppet khans of the line of Chagatai, to whom he claims kinship by marriage; in consequence he styles himself guregen, meaning "son-in-law" (i.e.; of the Chagataid khan). He lacks the innate administrative capacity or the foresight of Genghis Khan, and after his death his conquests are disputed among his numerous progeny.

NOTE 3 From the beginnings of recorded history, pastoral nomadism, practiced on a grandiose scale, was the economic

basis of the great Central Asian empires. Once the domestication of the horse was sufficiently advanced to allow for its use in warfare, the superiority of the mounted archer over the foot soldier or the war chariot was never effectively challenged.

When headed by capable leaders, well-trained and disciplined mounted troops were almost invincible. The sedentary civilizations could not, by their very nature, put aside for breeding purposes pastures sufficiently large to sustain a cavalry force that could equal that of the pastoral nomads; hence the latter's military superiority remained a constant for about 2,000 years of Eurasian history.

At its highest degree of development, Central Asian nomad society constituted a very sophisticated and highly specialized social and economic structure, advanced but also highly vulnerable because of its specialization and the lack of diversification of its economy. Geared almost entirely to the production of war material - i.e., the horse - when not engaged in warfare, it was un-able to provide the people with anything but the barest necessities of life. To ensure their very existence, Central Asian empires had to wage war and obtain through raids or tribute the commodities they could not produce. When, owing to circumstances such a severe weather decimating the horse herds or inept leadership, raids against other peoples became impossible, the typical Central Asian nomad state had to disintegrate to allow its population to fend for itself and secure the necessities for a subsistence. Hunting and pastoral nomadism both needed vast expanses to support a thinly scattered population that did not naturally lend itself to strong, centralized political control. The skill of a Central Asian leader consisted precisely in the gathering of such dispersed populations and in providing for them on a level higher than they had been accustomed to. There was but one way to achieve this; successful raid on other, preferably richer, peoples. The military machinery was dependent on numbers, which then precluded self-sufficiency. In case of prolonged military reverses, the nomadic aggregation of warriors had to disband because it was only in dispersion that they could be economically autonomous without recourse to war.

In the course of the 15th century, the steppe territory suitable for great horse herds began to shrink. In the east the Yung-lo emperor of the Ming led five major campaigns against the Mongols (1410-24), all successful but none decisive. Yet when, under the leadership of Esen Taiji (1439-55), the Mongol Oyrats pushed as far as Peking (Beijing), they found the city defended by cannon, and they withdrew. In the Middle East, the Ottoman and Safavid gunpowder empires barred the road to the no-longer-invincible nomad cavalry, and along the western borders of Central Asia, the Russians were soon to start on their decisive and irresistible march across Central Asia to the borders of China, India and Iran.

NOTE 4 The most spectacular advance of the Russians into Central Asia carried them eastward through the forest belt, where the hunting and fishing populations offered little resistance and where the much-coveted furs of Siberia could be found in abundance. Acting on behalf of the Stroganov family of entrepreneurs, in 1578 or 1581 the Cossack Yermak crossed the Urals and defeated the Shaybanid prince Kuchum, who alone represented organized political power in Siberia.

The Russian advance from west to east across Siberia, motivated by commercial rather than political considerations, remains unparalleled in history for its rapidity. The native Finno-Ugrians - Samoyed or Tungus hunters accustomed to paying their fur tribute - were little concerned with the nationality of the tax collectors and found it no more unpleasant to deal with the Russians than with Turks or Mongols.

NOTE 5 The thorniest question to be dealt with in the early Russo-Chinese negotiations concerned the Mongols - wedged between the two Great Powers - who, in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, reasserted their control over most of the steppe belt. Altan's reign saw the conversion of a great many Mongols to the tenets of the Dge-lugs-pa (Yellow Hat) sect of Tibetan Buddhism, a religion that, until the 1920's, played a major role in Mongol life. The active Central Asian policy of China's Ch'ing (Manchu) dynasty brought a lasting transformation in the political structure of the region.

More distant from China, the Oyrats could pursue a more independent course. One of their tribes, the Dzungars, created a powerful state that remained a serious menace to China until 1757, when the Ch'ien-lung emperor defeated their last ruler, Amursana, and thus put an end to the last independent Mongol state prior to the creation, in 1921, of Outer Mongolia (the Khalkha princes had submitted to the Manchu in 1691).

The treaties of Nercinsk and Kiakhta established the northern border of the Chinese zone of influence, which included Mongolia. In the wars against the Dzungars, the Chinese established their rule over East Turkestan and Dzungaria. China's western boundary remained undefined, but it ran farther west than it does today and included Lake Balkhash and parts of the Kazak steppe.

Wedged between the Russian and Chinese empires, unable to break through the stagnant but solid Ottoman and

Safavid barriers, the Turkish nomads of the steppe lying east of the Volga and the Caspian Sea and south of Russian-occupied Siberia found themselves caught in a trap from which there was no escape. If there is a cause for surprise, it lies in the lateness rather than in the fact of the ultimate Russian conquest.

NOTE 6 The Russian conquests in Central Asia had given the tsars control of a vast area of striking geographic and human diversity, acquired at relatively little effort in terms of men and money. The motives for the conquest had not been primarily economic; peasant colonization of the virgin steppes and the systematic cultivation of cotton were later developments. The factors that determined the Russian advance into the area were complex and interrelated. They included the historic pull of the frontier, the thirst for military glory on the part of the officer corps, and the fear of further British penetration into Central Asia from across the Indus River, as well as the infectious rhetoric of imperialism common to the age.

From the outset, Russia's objectives as a colonial power were strictly limited; to maintain "law and order" at minimum cost and to disturb as little as possible the traditional way of life of its new subjects. Such an approach was favored by the remoteness of the area and its isolation even from the rest of the Muslim world. It was improbable that an almost wholly illiterate population, its prejudices formed by a venal and obscurantist 'ulama' (class of Muslim theologians and scholars), could offer any concerted resistance to the Russian presence; and such, indeed, proved to be the case. The Russians, like other colonial powers, did experience an occasional uprising, generally of a very localized character, but the overwhelming military superiority displayed by the Russians at the time of the initial conquest, the inability of the inhabitants of the khanates to offer effective resistance, and the heavy-handedness with which subsequent insurrection or insubordination was dealt ensured minimal opposition. Finally, by preserving the titular sovereignty of the emir of Bukhara and the khan of Khiva, they left a substantial part of the population, especially the urban classes, most deeply devoted to the Islamic way of life, under traditionally minded Muslim rulers.

Yet the Russians, whether intentionally or not, became agents of change throughout the area in much the same way as any other colonial power. The regional economy was gradually realigned to meet the Russian need for raw materials and new markets. This required the construction of railroads. The Turkestan-Siberian Rail-road came after the others, begun just before World War I and not completed until 1930. In Tashkent and Samarkand new European suburbs were laid out at a distance from the walled native cities, but, as in the case of the newly established garrison towns, such islands of European life required local services and supplies. Nor did the Russians wholly ignore the welfare of their new subjects. An effort was made, halfheartedly at first, to put down the indigenous slave trade, irrigation projects were initiated, and bilingual elementary education was cautiously introduced. As elsewhere in colonial Asia, the work of Russian scholars studying the literature, history, and antiquities of the Central Asian peoples aroused on the part of a numerically small but influential Russian-educated elite, especially among the Kazaks, nostalgic awareness of a colorful past and a sense of national, or cultural, identity.

Of the major ethnic groups in Central Asia - Uzbeks, Kazaks, Turkmens, Tajiks and Kyrgyz - the Kazaks are the first to respond to the impact of Russian culture. Their early contacts with their new masters had in the main been carried out through intermediaries - Kazan Tatars, who, paradoxically, had contributed to strengthening the Kazaks' awareness of being part of a greater Muslim world community and their sense of being a "nation" rather than a welter of tribes and clans. Moreover, through the Tatars they were exposed to current Pan-Turkish and Pan-Islamic propaganda. In the 1870's the Russians countered Tatar influence by establishing bi-lingual Russian-Kazak schools, from which emerged a Westernized elite of considerable distinction.

This "dialogue" between the Russians and Kazaks was, however, doomed by the government's policy of settling peasants from European Russia and Ukraine on the Kazak steppe, where agricultural settlement on an extensive scale could be undertaken only by cur-tailing the area available for grazing by the nomads' livestock and by restricting their seasonal migrations. As early as 1867-68 the northwestern fringes of the Kazak steppe had been the scene of violent protests at the presence of colonists, but it was not until the last decade of the century that the movement got fully under way with the arrival of upward of one million peasants, resulting in the inevitable expropriation of Kazak grazing grounds and in savage conflict between the Kazaks and the intruders. Finally in 1916, during World War I, the Kazaks, driven to desperation by the loss of their lands and by the ruthlessness of the wartime administration, rose up in protest against a decree conscripting the non-Russian subjects of the empire for forced labor. The rebellion assumed the character of a popular uprising, in which many colonists and many more Kazaks and Kyrgyz were massacred. The revolt was put down with the utmost savagery, and more than 300,000 Kazaks are said to have sought refuge across the Chinese frontier.

With the collapse of tsarist rule, the Westernized Kazak elite formed a party, the Alash Orda, as a vehicle through which they could express their aspirations for regional autonomy. Having found during the Russian Civil War

that the anticommunist "Whites" were implacably opposed to their aspirations, the Kazaks cast in their lot with the "Reds". After the war the Kazaks were granted their own republic, in which, for the first few years, the leaders of the Alash Orda maintained a fairly dominant position and were active in protecting Kazak interests. After 1924, however, direct confrontation with the Communist Party became more intense, and in 1927-28 the Alash Orda leaders were liquidated as "bourgeois nationalists". The history of the Kazaks in the first half of the 20th century was bleak indeed - expropriation of their grazing lands under the tsars, the bloody uprising and reprisals of 1916, the losses in the civil war and in the famine of 1921, the purges of the intelligentsia in 1927-28, collectivization during the 1930's and further peasant colonization after World War II.

In Transoxiana - which was divided between the administration of the Russian governor-general of Turkestan, based on Tashkent, and that of the emir of Bukhara and the khan of Khiva - opposition to colonial domination was centered in the most conservative elements of a profoundly Islamic society, the 'ulama' and the inhabitants of the bazaar. Nonetheless, the Russians favored, for reasons of expediency, the preservation of the traditional social framework and endeavored, with only partial success, to insulate the inhabitants of the region from contact with the more "advanced" Muslims of the empire - the Volga and Crimean Tatars. In this they were aided by the fact that the virtual absence of European colonization provided no fuel for popular resentment comparable to that felt by the Kazaks; and, in consequence, the Westernized products of the bilingual Russian-Uzbek educational system, concerned primarily with reform of the Islamic way of life, regarded the Muslim "ultras" as their most dangerous opponents.

If the main influence in shaping the outlook of the Kazak intelligentsia was the educational system imported from European Russia, the catalyst in the case of the Uzbeks was knowledge of the educational reforms and the Pan-Turkish ideology of the Crimean Tatar renaissance of the late 19th century. The Uzbek reformers, known as Jadids, advocated the introduction of a modern educational system as a prerequisite for social change and cultural revitalization; despite intense opposition from the clerical classes, they opened their first school in Tashkent in 1901 and by 1914 had established more than 100. After 1908, influenced by the Young Turks of the Ottoman Empire, the Young Bukharans and the Young Khivans worked for a program of radical institutional change in the ramshackle governments of the khanates. It may be doubted, however, whether by 1917 the Uzbek intelligentsia had made any substantial impact outside a fairly narrow circle of like-minded persons.

NOTE 7 Neither before nor after the Russian Revolution of 1917 were the nationalist aspirations of the Muslims of Central Asia compatible with the interests of the Russian state or those of the European population of the region. This was demonstrated once and for all when the troops of the Tashkent Soviet crushed a short-lived Muslim government established in Kokand in January 1918. Indeed, the Soviet authorities in Central Asia regarded the native intelligentsia, even the most "progressive" of them, with lively and (from their point of view) justifiable apprehension. At the same time, there was the problem of an active resistance on the part of conservative elements, which was anti-Russian as much as anticommunist. Having extinguished the khanate of Khiva in 1919 and that of Bukhara in 1920, local Red Army units found themselves engaged in a protracted struggle with the Basmachis, guerrillas operating in the mountains in the eastern part of the former khanate of Bukhara. Not until 1925 did the Red Army gain the upper hand.

Thereafter, Central Asia was increasingly integrated into the Soviet system through the implementation of planned economy and improved communications, through the communist institutional and ideological framework of control, and, for young males, through compulsory service in the Red Army. The economy of the region became further distorted to meet the needs of the central planners. Traditional religion, values, and culture were suppressed, but in such areas as education, health care, and welfare Central Asians benefited to a degree from their forced participation in the system.

Eventually the Soviets developed an ingenious strategy for neutralizing the two common denominators most likely to unite Central Asians against continuing control from Moscow: Islamic culture and Turkish ethnicity. After a protracted period of trial and error, their ultimate solution was the creation of five Soviet socialist republics in the region; the Kazakh SSR (now Kazakhstan) in 1936, the Kirgiz SSR (now Kyrgyzstan) in 1936, the Tadzhik SSR (now Tajikistan) in 1929, the Turkmen SSR (now Turkmenistan) in 1924 and the Uzbek SSR (now Uzbekistan) in 1924. The plan was to will into being five new nations whose separate development under close surveillance and firm tutelage from Moscow would preempt the emergence of a "Turkestanian" national identity and such concomitant ideologies as Pan-Turkism or Pan-Islamism. To some extent, this ethno-engineering reflected colonial conceptions of the peoples of Central Asia dating back to tsarist times.

Thus the Kazaks, whose absorption into the Russian Empire had been a gradual process extending from the early 18th to the early 19th century, were perceived as wholly separate from the Uzbeks south of the Syr Darya, whose territories had been annexed during the mid-19th century. As speakers of an Iranian language, the Tajiks could be clearly

distinguished from their Turkish-speaking neighbors, while the Russian perception of the nomadic Turkmens, whom they had conquered during the closing years of the 19th century, set them apart from the sedentary Uzbeks. Similarly, the Kyrgyz of the Issyk-Kul region (whom the Russians of tsarist times had confusingly designated "Kara-Kirgiz", while applying the name "Kirgiz" to the Kazaks) were declared to be distinct from their Kazak neighbors.

The colonial experience and 19th-century Russian ethnological and anthropological fieldwork were, then, when appropriate, enlisted by the Soviets to serve very different ideological ends. Inevitably, the boundaries of these artificial creations willed into being by Soviet fiat did not reflect the ethnic and cultural patterns of Central Asia, and all five republics contained substantial minority populations (among them, immigrants from European Russia), a situation which, with the coming of independence in 1991, was fraught with the likelihood of future conflicts. To ensure the success of this design for stabilizing Central Asia under Soviet rule, school textbooks, scholarly research and publishing, and cultural policies in general were devised to stress, on the one hand, the particular and unique experience of each republic and, on the other, the enduring benefits of the Russian connection, which paradoxically required that the tsarist conquests and their consequences be represented as an overwhelming boon to Central Asians. Great significance was given to language policy, with strenuous efforts being made to emphasize the linguistic differences among the various Turkish languages spoken in the republics, clear evidence of intent to divide and rule.

During the last two decades of Soviet history (1970-91), the remoteness and economic backwardness of Central Asia meant that this region felt less intensely the winds of change beginning to blow through metropolitan Russia, Ukraine, or the Baltic republics, although from 1979 Soviet intervention in neighboring Afghanistan produced ripple effects across the frontier. Historians, however, may conclude that the most significant aspects of the history of Central Asia under the Soviets were the extent to which its peoples managed to retain their traditional cultural heritage under the most debilitating circumstances.

Notes From: www.Britannica.com; Central Asia, History of