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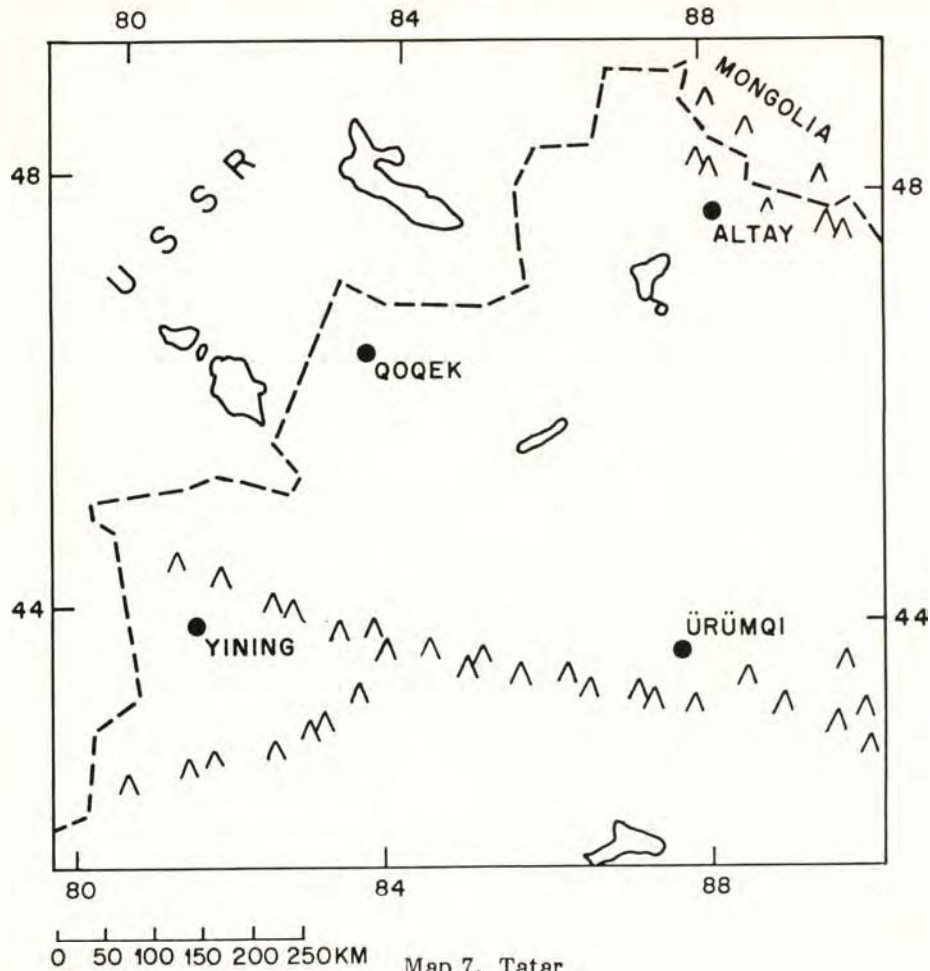
Tatar

Size and Location

The Tatars 塔塔尔 are not only one of the smaller nationalities in China but are also one of very few who have actually declined in numbers since the 1950s. They declined from over 4,300 in 1957¹ to 4,127 in 1982.² Most of them live in a few cities in Xinjiang, such as Yining, Qoqek (Tacheng) and Ürümqi (see Map 7). In the early 1960s some other Tatars also lived scattered in farming and herding districts of Burqin, Qitai, and Ürümqi counties as well as in several major cities of Southern Xinjiang. Later sources no longer make any mention of the latter-named Tatars. This omission is directly linked to the decline of the Tatar population in China and both are related to the events of the early 1960s. The Tatars have no autonomous areas.

History³

Dadan 鞑达鞑 is the transcription found as early as the eighth century in Chinese records.⁴ Before that time the Tatars were part of the Turk khanate. After the demise of the khanate around 744, the Tatars gradually grew stronger. These original Tatars continued to exist until the rise of the Mongol power which smashed them. Despite this fact, when the Mongols moved west into Europe and West Asia, European and Middle Eastern sources began to refer to the Mongols as Tartars, a word close in sound but actually having no connection at all with the Tatars. Rather, the word "Tartar" was a derogatory term, meaning people coming from Hell (Tartarus) by which Europeans sought to explain away their utter defeat at the hands of the Mongol armies.



As the Mongol world empire reached its zenith in the mid-thirteenth century, its western division, the Golden Horde, stretched from the lower Danube to the Erjis river and was ruled by Kaidu, Chinggis Khan's grandson. It was within this Golden Horde that the remnants of the original Tatars may have survived and closely interacted with Boyars, Kipchak and Mongols. A new nationality gradually arose from this mixture, the beginning of the modern Tatars. They became the principal inhabitants of the fifteenth-century Kushan khanate which arose in the region of the middle reaches of the Furfia and Kama rivers. They called themselves Tatar. When in the nineteenth century Tsarist Russian influence expanded into Central Asia, the Tatars fled in different directions. While some moved north to Kazan, others migrated through Western Siberia and Kazakhstan to Northern Xinjiang. Still another group of Tatars went south across the Pamirs and entered Southern Xinjiang.

The Sino-Russian treaties of 1851 and 1881 opened new opportunities for the Tatars. As Russian commerce entered Xinjiang, some additional groups of Tatars crossed the border and began trading in the cities of Xinjiang. They were accompanied by a number of Tatar intellectuals and religious personnel. A small number of Tatars became wealthy as owners and managers of foreign banks and commercial establishments engaged in the import and export of such items as livestock, furs, wool, silver, cotton, foreign cloth, tea, and silk. While most Tatars were thus engaged in the cities, a relatively small number of them were mostly poor herders, owning a couple of animals and working on the lands owned by Tatar and Kazak landlords. Poverty even drove some of them into part-time farming to make ends meet. Finally, a third group of Tatars went into small handicraft businesses, typically run by one man or one family, making sausage casings or being engaged in tailoring and embroidery.

Language and Literature⁵

Tatar belongs to the Kipchak branch of the Turkic group of the Altaic family of languages. It has nine vowels and twenty-two basic consonants. Vowels:

<u>a</u> as in <u>julda</u> 'comrade'	<u>o</u> as in <u>toz</u> 'salt'
<u>ε</u> as in <u>her</u> 'each, every'	<u>u</u> as in <u>kul</u> 'arm'
<u>e</u> as in <u>tel</u> 'tongue, language'	<u>ø</u> as in <u>kön</u> 'day'
<u>i</u> as in <u>min</u> 'I'	<u>y</u> as in <u>kyl</u> 'lake'
<u>ī</u> as in <u>ilis</u> 'pine needle'	

Consonants:

<u>b</u> as in <u>bala</u> 'child'	<u>ŋ</u> as in <u>kin</u> 'wide'
<u>w</u> as in <u>wakıt</u> 'time'	<u>j</u> as in <u>aj</u> 'moon'
<u>g</u> as in <u>sigez</u> 'eight'	<u>p</u> as in <u>kitap</u> 'book'
<u>l</u> as in <u>jul</u> 'road'	<u>t</u> as in <u>taw</u> 'mountain'
<u>n</u> as in <u>kön</u> 'day'	<u>s</u> as in <u>sin</u> 'you' (sing.)
<u>m</u> as in <u>jom/ak</u> 'soft'	<u>ʃ</u> as in <u>eʃ</u> 'work'
<u>ɖ</u> as in <u>ɖır</u> 'earth'	<u>k</u> as in <u>kyk</u> 'blue'
<u>d</u> as in <u>dyrt</u> 'four'	<u>tʃ</u> as in <u>øtʃ</u> 'three'
<u>r</u> as in <u>ber</u> 'one'	<u>x</u> as in <u>xatin</u> 'woman'
<u>z</u> as in <u>zur</u> 'big'	<u>h</u> as in <u>hem</u> 'and'
<u>ʒ</u> as in <u>ıǵıǵıw</u> 'to hiss'	<u>f</u> as in <u>fajda</u> 'use, utility'

In addition, the consonants y and ç are used only for Russian loan words and the consonant ʔ for Arabic loan words.

As in other Turkic languages, vowel harmony is observed in Tatar. If the

first syllable of a word contains a front vowel (i, e, ɛ, o, or y), subsequent syllables must have e or ɛ; if the first syllable contains a back vowel (i, a, u, or o), subsequent syllables must have ı or a.

The Tatars in Xinjiang do not have their own script but use the Uigur and Kazak scripts. On the other hand, Tatar influences can be found in the dialect spoken by Uigurs and Kazaks in the Qoqek region of northwestern Xinjiang.⁶

There is practically no new Tatar literature available in Xinjiang⁷ which is surprising in view of the relatively large number of intellectuals among the Tatars around the turn of this century.⁸ In their medrese they taught not only Islamic subjects but also arithmetic, language, and other cultural subjects. The Tatar school established in Yining in 1941 was one of the earliest modern schools in the entire province.⁹

Society¹⁰

In the past, most city Tatars were monogamous. Like among other Muslim nationalities, intermarriage was fairly common, except that marriage between first or second cousins on the paternal side was forbidden. Also, marriages between children of a brother and a sister were extremely rare.

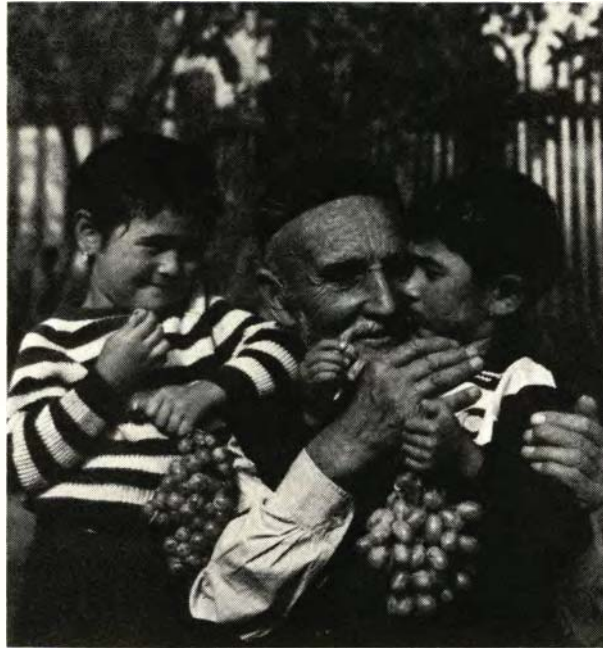
Weddings took place at the bride's parents' home. The newlyweds drank a cup of sugar water, symbolizing love and happiness until old age. The couple would usually stay there for some time, some even waiting until the first child was born before they moved into their own home. On the third day after a child was born, a name was chosen, usually a religious one. According to custom, when a child reached maturity he added another name which served as a patronymic. On the seventh day after birth the maternal grandparents would present a cradle and baby clothes, and on the fortieth day the baby is given a bath with water taken from forty different sources. The idea was to ensure good health.

When a person died, relatives would clean the body and wrap it in white cloth and place a knife or rock on it. The body then is placed on a platform and removed from the house, feet first. Once outside, the direction is reversed and the procession moves to the cemetery. While excerpts from the Koran are being recited, attendants toss handfuls of dirt onto the corpse and then the burial is completed.

Men usually wore white embroidered shirts with a black vest or robe over it. Black pants and black skullcaps with white embroidery completed their attire (see Illustration 15). Women usually wore white, yellow or purple blouses and flowery skirts. In more recent times both men and women adopted Western dress.

City Tatars live in flat-roofed adobe houses which have walls with flues for space heating. Courtyards are full of flowers and trees. In the herding areas, Tatars lived in tents.

Tatar



Illus. 15. Old and Young Tatars

The Tatar diet includes, especially on festive occasions, two kinds of cakes called gubaidiai and yitebailixi which are round, crisp on the outside and soft and creamy on the inside. The chief ingredients are eggs, flour, pumpkin, and meat. The Tatars also love to eat cheese, dried apricots, and rice. Their favorite drinks are kerxima, a beer-like beverage made of fermented honey, and kesaile, a grape wine.

The Tatars are noted for their passion for singing and dancing.¹¹ Besides several other occasions, the most festive holiday, sapan (meaning plough), is held each spring, during which dance competitions are held. There are also horse races, and so-called egg races in which competitors carry a raw egg on a spoon. The objective is to reach the goal first without spilling the egg. Much singing is indulged in which is accompanied by several instruments, including the harmonica and string instruments found among the Uigurs and other nationalities of Xinjiang.¹²

Notes

¹Jiankuang, v. 3, 39.

²Minzu yanjiu 23 (1983), 81.

³Historical information has been taken from Jiankuang, v. 3, 39 and Zhongguo, 251-252.

⁴Some other transliterations are 达旦, 达达, 达鞑.

⁵Linguistic information is primarily based on Poppe.

⁶Jiankuang, v. 3, 39.

⁷Several Tatar short stories are translated in Zuopin xuan.

⁸See the collection of stories published by Katanov in 1894.

⁹Zhongguo, 253.

¹⁰Zhongguo, 254-255.

¹¹See Dmitriev and Iskhakova-Bamba for examples of Tatar songs in the Soviet Union. Some of them are also popular among the Tatars of Xinjiang.

¹²See the chapters on Uigurs, Uzbeks, and Kirgiz for illustrations.