

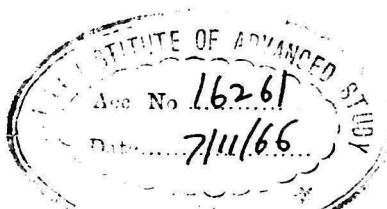
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CENTRAL ASIAN YOUTH GROWS UP

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Meeting held at The Royal Society's Hall on Wednesday, January 11, 1961, General Sir Richard Gale, Chairman of Council, presiding.

The CHAIRMAN : I should like to start by wishing you a very happy New Year, and particularly the youngsters. I cannot say, as the Chairman of the Council, what a pleasure it is to me to see the younger generation here. I am quite certain that they will be extremely interested in this afternoon's lecture. It gives me the greatest pleasure to introduce Colonel Fox Holmes to you. He has lived a long time in Chinese Turkistan. I think he went out there first for seven years as a missionary; and from my little knowledge of Asia I would say that if anybody really gets under the skin of people, and gets to know the country, it is the missionary. He was a medical missionary and that is, in more ways than one, an excellent way of getting under the skin of people!

Later on he spent three years as His Majesty's Consul General in that part of the world, until the Communists put him in "jug." I believe that he had eventually to be flown out with his family. Since then he has been to Turkey to collect material on the Kazakhs, and he is working for the Royal Geographical Society of which he is a Fellow. Those are a few remarks about a very experienced man, and I will now ask Colonel Fox Holmes to give us his talk. (*Applause.*)

It is a great privilege to be here today, and also to have some members of my family present. I am glad to say the younger end of the family shared our experiences when my wife and I travelled through the Gobi Desert, and later at the British Consulate in Urumchi. I thought of no better way to introduce my subject than to show you slides revealing something of the country through which one must pass in order to reach that great border area which lies between China and Russia. The political conditions are always significant; today, as for centuries long, Chinese and Russian power grind against one another, with the young people about whom we are to hear this afternoon, between them, as grain between the upper and nether millstones.

On the eastern side there are the Chinese, wedded to an all-embracing ideology, diligent, hard working and producing much in the way of material results. To the west there are the Russians, using their own forceful methods, more than convinced of their superiority in handling the border people. Unfortunately these cannot avoid the attentions of two differing political systems, nor can their personal lives fail to be influenced by totalitarian methods, which both sides fervently adopt as the sole key to progress.

At this point I would like to thank Colonel Wheeler for so kindly lending the slides of the Russian side of the border, without these the comparison I seek to make would have been poorly illustrated.

As you will see from the map, China covers a very large area, and the Chinese race has a great deal to do with the future of what we like to call Central Asia, but which they strongly maintain is an integral part of China. We must also remember that on the coast of China there is much

over-population, with people living in very cramped conditions, whereas even now over in the Far West there are vast areas completely unpopulated.

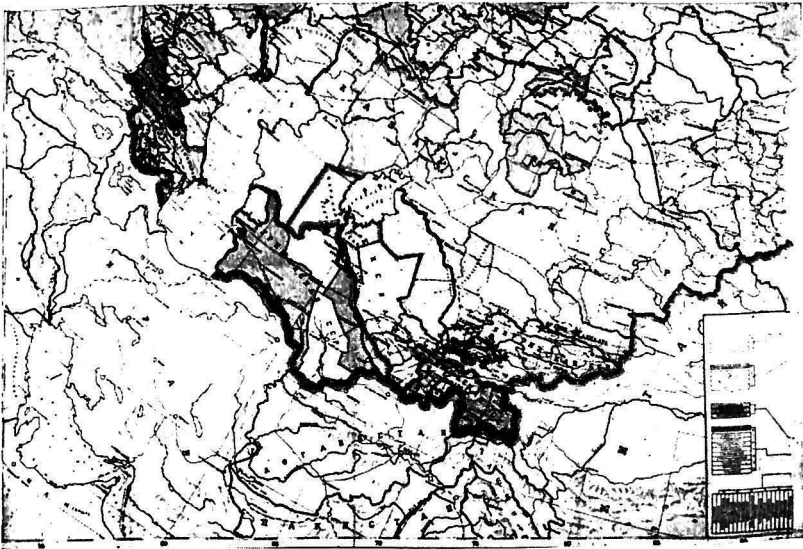
Besides this population pressure there is another pertinent factor for the Chinese to reckon with. The area adjacent to the Russian border is populated by many diverse races, not Chinese in origin, nor do they speak some dialect of the Chinese language, even less do they look with favour on the Chinese way of life. Turki, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Mongol, and Tajik alike are proud of their own long histories and cultural backgrounds. For years they have responded feebly to the facilities the Chinese have given for their children to attend Chinese schools. Apart from the Mongols most of them are Muslim and hotly resent being classed as Chinese whom they regard as the worst kind of idolators. Indeed, the word "Khitai" was a term of abuse until 1950, though it has no other meaning than "Chinese."

On the Russian side of the border there are the same races sharing a common group of languages and culture. To the north, the Mongols. To the west, the Kazakhs; in the south-west, the Kirghiz; while the Tajiks of both sides speak their common language based on Persian. On the map you will see large administrative divisions classified as Autonomous Republics, but I am afraid this is not a very fair representation, for, on neither side of the border may these ancient races develop along their own cultural lines as they would wish.

From the Chinese coastal cities there is this mass movement of population, measured in tens of thousands, to offset the fact that only a few years ago the racial Chinese were but 9 per cent. of the population. Into Central Asia from the Russian side is a never-ending flow of European Russians, spreading out and settling in this land of the great Khans, in many places they now form 50 per cent. of the local population.

Now a Kazakh youth on the Russian side learns Russian as his second language, frequently wears adaptations of Russian clothing, and is indoctrinated in the Russian manner. His cousin on the Chinese side, born at the same time, has to learn Chinese as his second language, and will wear the shapeless baggy, padded clothes of the Chinese cadre, his indoctrination will be in accord with principles of Mao Tse Tung. Those of us who have lived for any length of time in those parts realize what a poor substitute either way of life can be for their own wonderful culture stretching back to the days of Timurlane, and their own clothing, both colourful and well suited to the climate and life of their traditional homelands. Someone may well ask, "Isn't Communism a great leveller so that both sides will become one?" On the contrary, this process of assimilation swallows up the identity of the border races as a palatable plate of food before two hungry hunters. Unfortunately when the meal is over there is nothing left but a Russian bear facing a Chinese dragon over an empty plate.

Now for a brief description of the long route that links China with Russia. Soon the railway line will be the main vital link, but generally speaking, if you would travel across the Gobi Desert the main form of transport is the motor truck. This carries a heavy commercial load besides the petrol and other things that will be needed on the journey. In my day, the driver gauged his load by inserting two fingers in between the rear



MAP OF FRONTIER ALIGNMENT



MAP SHOWING CENTRAL ASIA IN RELATION TO THE REST OF THE U.S.S.R.



LAB-I-HAUZ AND FORMER MOSQUE

wheels and the mudguards, just allowing sufficient clearance for the wheels to turn when bouncing over the ill-made track. Thus a five-ton truck would be loaded with seven tons, and the passengers rode on the top of a swaying nightmare, from which people frequently fell and were seriously hurt.

When you set out along the ancient road through Kansu Province of China's North-West one soon comes to the Great Wall, which was purposely built to keep out the very tribes which are now claimed to be Chinese. This wall was once reckoned as the boundary of civilization beyond which lived the barbarians. Indeed, far-away Ili on the Russian border was the ultimate banishment from which offenders against the Imperial Court seldom, if ever, returned. In these days many hundreds of trucks roll up and down this long road from China to Russia, yet in many long arid stretches stone for surfacing the roads is so scarce that if the track is washed away, the drivers merely seek an easier way round the churned-up mud.

By many the Gobi is thought to be a waterless area where it never rains; actually the rainfall averages about 2 inches a year, and when it does rain the brown barren landscape swiftly assumes the nature of an inland sea. Frothy brown waves billow all round the truck, and should one muff a gear or stall the engine, at once the truck sinks to the axles. Having traversed the Gobi some eight times when something equally dramatic has happened on each occasion, there is this to be said for it—infinite variety never allows the same thing to happen twice. For the most part travel through the Gobi is monotonous. In the summer, the small clouds in the sky give no shelter from the blazing sun; should one have a following wind the radiator boils, slowing progress while the trucks are turned into the wind to cool off. In the winter an icy blast sweeps close to the ground, with the roar of a lion, the truck or driver not properly protected can freeze to death in a few hours.

Perhaps it would be wrong to particularize as the track varies greatly with the nature of the terrain. One may pass swiftly from man-made metalled surface, through clogging sand and even sand dunes, along some ancient dry river bed to the Black Gobi where one may hurtle along a smooth surfaced plateau at fifty miles per hour. Not a few people have lost their lives in this way, for a washout may suddenly appear almost underneath the bonnet, then the only resource, swerving, may turn the vehicle over on its side. Up in the deep gorges of the Tien Shan the road is virtually a cart track from which one still has to stop to remove heavy boulders. The route is the same that was followed hundreds of years ago, dry bones of man and beast indicate that catastrophe overtook some weary traveller *en route*. The views in the high mountains, and above all, journey's end, make light of the hardships encountered. We need to remind ourselves that thousands of Central Asians and hordes of Chinese have pitted themselves against nature to lay a railway track through one of the most feared deserts in the world. Central Asian youth grows up the hard way, death overtaking the weaker ones in the process.

Though motor trucks are the commonest means of transport for long distances, it is quite usual to meet long camel trains anywhere *en route*.

Heavily laden donkeys trot for incredible distances with a load too heavy for man to carry, often driven by a man so careful of his own boot leather that his boots are carried slung round his neck. Horse carts in long convoys pass by clanging their metallic cacophony produced by large bells slung beneath each horse's neck. With only one driver to ten carts he can at once determine that a horse has stopped, and leap from his leading cart to find the reason why. Perhaps the most thrilling sight of all is to see a whole Kazakh tribe in migration; tents, utensils, household goods and all the members of the family carried on numerous animals; even the sheep and goats carrying their share of the load. The acrid dust, shouts and whistles used to guide such a large body of men and beasts form an indelible memory of a land with ways unchanged even from the time of Abraham.

I would like to turn now from people in the mass to individuals, and these feeling the wind of change sweeping across their lives. First, let us look at where they live. Wherever there is sufficient water supply large towns are found. Sometimes there is much less water than is needed, yet roads converge and strategic reasons call for guard posts with a few houses nearby, forming isolated hamlets. Many of the larger towns have existed in some form or another over the last five hundred years. The buildings of the town are not likely to be the same as in the original township, for more likely than not it will have been burnt and looted scores of times. Indeed, with periodic frequency, war has devastated the land following the pattern of Attila the Hun, who liked to leave no enemies behind him. Even so, some of the mosques and bazaars are of great antiquity, and the actual buildings being made of mud brick with wooden framework follow fairly regular patterns. Since 1950 the Chinese have built many public buildings, even new towns; and like the Russians on their side, emphasis has been on three things—schools, hospitals and a large hotel in each place. The walls of such buildings are very thick to keep out the intense cold of winter. Both Russian and Chinese architecture have this problem that is never adequately solved; hence the solid blocks of buildings rectangular in shape, unvaried and unseemly, infinitely lacking in grace compared with the soaring mosques that proclaim an older and more gracious culture.

Many of the present officials in Central Asia have received their training at the University of Tashkent. Whatever the course of study followed, the students are introduced to political science, which forms the main theme of their future life. If you should meet young men and women trained in this place, and know them intimately as I have done, you will perceive there has been made a major attempt to form in their minds an impression that the Russians are right in everything they do, and theirs the only successful way of life. The Chinese for their part are also training young people in the same science, their textbooks however are biased towards the Chinese way of life; the outcome is that their graduates too firmly believe that they have the only right methods, even to regarding the Russians as unorthodox in certain things. A clash between two such inflexible and doughty proponents of "The only successful world system" is inevitable, and may be seen already over the issue of co-existence with the West, or the more direct method of war, favoured by Russia and China

respectively. Nor may the Chinese forget that graduates of Tashkent, previously selected from rich traders' sons, and trained in subversion, were used to overthrow the Chinese government of previous régimes in Sinkiang by spreading hatred of all things Chinese. It may have been this policy which has caused the Chinese Communists, when selecting their trainees from among the minority races, to take only the poorest of the poor. It would be interesting to know the proportion of Han (Chinese by race) students to the total number of Uighur, Kazakh and Uzbek now attending Tashkent. It may soon be Chinese policy to allow the minority racial students only to attend Chinese universities.

I promised to speak of individuals feeling the wind of change. One such stands out very clearly in my mind. He was the son of a very wealthy Urumchi merchant selected for training in Tashkent when in his early teens. After a few years of training he was sent back into Sinkiang and became the Circuit Judge of Kucha, one of the largest towns in the south. He had complete power of life and death over all the people who passed through or resided in his county; and this before he reached the age of twenty. No merchant or traveller could move along the main road without his personal seal on the Road Permit. Even though I had my papers issued by the Governor of Sinkiang, it was essential for my onward journey to seek an audience with him before I could even leave the town. I must point out this incident happened in 1937 as I rode from Urumchi to Kashgar. Presenting myself in native garb at the main gate of the yamen I was knocked down by a rifle butt, as one of the guards gave me the treatment meted out to the local population who sought admission. Being advised by the innkeeper to don Russian clothes and try again, I did so. This time the same guard who had knocked me down, saluted me, and escorted me into the presence. Here I was warmly received, until having had my passport endorsed and all legal matters completed I informed the official of my nationality, and also of my friendship with his father in Urumchi. I think you can see why today the Chinese prefer to have Eighth Route Army veterans near the border rather than minority officials who lean over backwards to please the Russians having been trained by them.

In matters of religion there have been tremendous changes brought about by both the Chinese and Russian rulers of Central Asia. For centuries past Tashkent and Bukhara turned out the most honoured of Muslim clerics. On both sides of the border Islamic law governed all the rites to do with birth, marriage and death. Then the schools for Muslim boys were part of the building of a mosque, teaching given was chiefly religious in nature, the secular part being confined to the three R's. Today's youth has completely secular teaching and attendance at the mosque is ridiculed. Teachers have powers to fail in their examinations such as are prepared to display the temerity of risking their displeasure by regular attendance at religious functions. On both sides of the border there are severe penalties to those who seek to spread religious propaganda among young people. There is this to be said for the Russians that they have the more liberal attitude, the Chinese still displaying a militant, relentless and implacable will to persecute anything that is linked with "The opiate of the people."

Chinese youth is trained to report on the religious practices of parents

and relatives; failure to do so is visited with severe penalties, and not least the risk that their efforts at school will be unrewarded by a position in the state machine. On the other side of the picture we must not forget that whereas girls and boys now mix freely together, play games together, work together in the fields or collective farms, less than twelve years ago in Sinkiang young girls were often married and divorced several times before they were twenty; few went to school, all were reckoned without civic rights and some were actual slaves to wealthy families. The emancipation of womanhood is probably one of the most noticeable changes affecting Central Asian youth as it grows up.

It may be thought by some that inevitably a liberalizing tendency will assert itself, that excesses and over-zealous applications of force will cease, allowing the better life to supervene. This makes no mention of those who die in the process. We have actually seen with our own eyes students made to haul heavy stones along frozen roads until some dropped dead with fatigue. Nor may we easily forget the young man who was killed outside the British Consulate in Urumchi, his body being left outside our children's window for a whole day. This type of thing, done for the "encouragement of others," still goes on in China, even though it doesn't seemingly merit the attention of the press. Yes! When roads are made in Tibet, a railway line laid through the Gobi, desert land brought under cultivation for the first time, new irrigation canals dug for endless miles—all in the name of material progress—we should remember the Communists publish no figures of the cost in human life. One official told me quite sincerely that China's only real exportable surplus is manpower. Hence, the readiness of the Chinese to supply "Volunteers" in any number as required. Indeed, it is one thing to hear of the survival of the fittest as an idea in a textbook, quite a different thing if it is a deliberate policy of government affecting you or your loved ones. There is a lesson in it for ourselves, for competing in world markets against the Communists, not merely for the purpose of making money, but far more, for our own economic survival; as a nation at work, we shall have to do far more than go out on strike at frequent intervals. Their young people work harder for longer hours, on less food, than we do—but let us remember they dare not do otherwise. As we value our freedom we shall need to take this lesson to heart.

Quite briefly I would like to turn to another aspect of the way of life affecting Central Asian Youth growing up in this modern world. Many travellers in these parts find the young people most interested in world affairs; not that they think themselves ignorant of what is going on, on the contrary, they seek to correct the "perverted views" put forward by the visitors. Why does this happen? The reason is not far to seek. Central Asian newspapers in many languages give news under topical headings from London and Rome, Paris and New York. But, for instance, news coming from London emanates from the *Daily Worker*, thus the bias is put into reporting, before the local editor is called upon to give a further twist. Sitting in Urumchi with only the local press to read, it is easy to believe the whole world has gone Communist, and that the few remaining "reactionary" elements in the West will speedily give way to the inevit-

able. History books are re-written, ancient plays revived, but again in the new form. Even modern plays may only feature such thoughts as faithfully mirror the current party line. Indeed, the whole cultural background has but one theme and one aim, so we may not marvel that the young people are affected by it.

Perhaps we should notice more than the bias of the press and cultural publications, the planned lack of privacy so that young folk grow up in herds rather than as individuals. So much of the day's activity is planned for group participation. Indeed, this is an article of faith to the Chinese Communists with their Communes. The lessons that International Communism learnt from Hungary have been taken to heart, for there it was the young people who struck a blow for freedom, there too that Russian tanks had to be used to put down a popular movement for a liberal government. The young men and women of Central Asia do not lack courage, but leadership that is truly "Of the people." They do not lack the will for freedom, but the opportunity to exercise it. The present rulers, Russian and Chinese, are doing their utmost to keep it that way.

Finally I would put forward my personal view based on thirty years' acquaintance with Central Asian Youth. They are of fine material, capable of independent thought and action, courageous and determined. Whatever the trammels set on their thought and action by the present régimes, youth is bound to assert itself. When that time comes it will go hard with the present rulers, for the revolutionary tactics and methods held up for admiration and adoption will be used against the very people who have taught them.

I hope our younger members of this Society will continue their present interest in their opposite numbers in Central Asia; that opportunity will come to them to travel widely in those parts. When Central Asian students visit England to see for themselves what we are like, may we show them the hospitality and consideration that alone will help them to correct their bias, and ultimately, to share our liberty.

DISCUSSION

The CHAIRMAN: The lecturer would be happy to answer any questions young members of the audience may have.

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: I was told the other day that the carpet industry of Bokhara, which was wonderful, has completely disappeared. Can the Colonel confirm or refute that?

Lieut.-Colonel Fox HOLMES: I believe it is not only so in Bokhara but in other parts of Turkistan. The carpet industries have all been taken over by people with "Go get them" ideas of production. The old carpets were turned out very slowly. The designs were considered to be taking too much time, and so they have been scrapped. That is what I have been told and believe to be true.

A MEMBER: Could the lecturer say whether the Gobi Desert is natural or man-made, and whether there is any possibility of irrigating it?

Lieut.-Colonel Fox HOLMES: I would say it is natural. I cannot imagine any man having the power to create such devastation. I believe that the Gobi Desert was once an inland sea. I believe it is possible to

cultivate the Gobi Desert. Today the Communists are using large tracts of the desert for bringing new crops into being because water exists quite deep down.

Group-Captain SMALLWOOD: May I ask the lecturer's permission to add something to that? Botanists have found all sorts of relics of animals and plants, so at one time the desert was most certainly not a desert but a very fertile place. There is no doubt that it was once a heavily afforested place with a great deal of reptile life.

A MEMBER: Has the Great Wall of China been preserved by the Chinese or left to disintegrate?

Lieut.-Colonel Fox HOLMES: The parts I have seen have largely been left to disintegrate, but I think you will find great stretches kept in some form of repair. It varies according to the district through which the Wall passes.

The CHAIRMAN: It only remains for me to thank our lecturer very much for a most stimulating and interesting discourse with some excellent pictures. I think that many of you young people will go away with thoughts on wanting to read and study more about this part of the world. I hope that a sense of adventure will make you want to visit it. I can assure you that it is only when you have travelled in these wonderful countries and met these astonishing people that you really taste the breath of life. You do not do it on the tarmac and pavements of England. Thank you very much. (*Applause.*)

