

THE MOSLEM REBELLION IN NORTHWEST CHINA

1862-1878

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THE MOSLEM REBELLION
IN NORTHWEST CHINA
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A STUDY OF GOVERNMENT MINORITY POLICY

by

WEN-DJANG CHU

1966

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In Memory of my Beloved Father
KING CHU
1887-1951

P R E F A C E

The great Moslem rebellion in Northwest China in the sixties and seventies of the 19th century has undoubtedly been greatly underestimated in most history books. Some writers have devoted a short paragraph to this subject; others have dismissed it with one sentence. This is hardly justifiable, because the aforesaid rebellion lasted more than 15 years, spread from Shensi to Sinkiang, covering almost one fourth of China's territory, and directly disturbed the life of more than 10,000,000 people. According to one source:

*The population of Kansu was reduced from 15,000,000 to 1,000,000, . . . nine out of every ten Chinese were supposed to have been killed, and two out of every three Mohammedans. . . . All the villages and farmsteads for miles and miles in all directions were in ruins, and the huge culturable hills were for the most part deserted.*¹

Other contemporary writers confirmed this tragic story. For instance, Tso Tsung-t'ang reported in one of his memorials: "With the exception of the 2,000 or more Moslems who fled together with Pai Yen-hu, there are no more than 60,000 of the original 700,000 to 800,000 Shensi Moslems who have survived to be rehabilitated in Kansu."² Yet strange though it may seem, very few people know much about this great uprising which uprooted the entire social life of Northwest China.

When the author first visited Northwest China, he knew no more about the Moslem Rebellion than what he had read from the short paragraphs in his history textbooks. It was there where he learned the serious effects of the past conflicts. The more he understood the situation, the more he became dissatisfied with the coverage of the

¹Marshall Broomhall: *Islam in China*, P. 155. Cf. Mark Bell: "The Country of the Dungan Rebellion of 1861 and 1895-6," *The Asiatic Quarterly Review*, 3rd Series, II, July, 1896, p. 25.

²*P'ing-ting Shen-Kan Sinkiang Hui-fei Fang-liieh*, CCLXXXVI, 8; Tso Tsung-t'ang; T. C. 12 y., 12 m., 22 d. or February 8, 1873.

story by ordinary history books. He felt it a duty to present a more complete picture of this important historical event. This work is a part of his effort.

Due to the scarcity of material from Moslem sources, the present work is forced to emphasize the domestic policy of the Manchu government. The author does not intend to touch upon the diplomatic field nor to elaborate upon the story from the Moslem point of view. He refers to military development and other factors only when they are helpful in understanding the policy.

The main sources of material are the documents compiled by the Manchu government in *P'ing-ting Shen-Kan Sinkiang Hui-fei Fang-lieh* (平定陝甘新疆回匪方略), supplemented by *Ta-ch'ing Shih-lu* (大清實錄) as well as numerous collections of works by the leading participants of the day, such as Tso Tsung-t'ang (左宗棠), Yang Yüeh-pin (楊岳斌), Liu Jung (劉蓉), Liu Chin-t'ang (劉錦棠), Yüan Pao-heng (袁保恆), Li Hung-chang (李鴻章), Tseng Kuo-fan (曾國藩), Tseng Chi-tse (曾紀澤) and others. Local gazettes were frequently consulted to clarify particular facts relating to the given locality. Accounts preserved by contemporary people are heavily depended upon to check the official documents for errors and deliberate whitewashing. Secondary works and semi-official reports are usually used to provide a general background.

Since most Westerners did not have much opportunity to participate in or even to observe the making of governmental policy of the period, there is very little material in Western languages which can help build up the main part of this work. There are, nevertheless some significant exceptions, such as the papers of Sir Robert Hart of the Chinese Customs House on the question of raising foreign loans. Several secondary Western works such as Marshall Broomhall's *Islam in China*, and Captain W. L. Bales' *Tso Tsung-t'ang* touch incidentally upon Manchu government policy, but they are far too brief and often incorrect, though sometimes useful. Western sources are especially enlightening on problems about the Moslem religion and people. They are also helpful in clarifying the international background.

It is hard work to plow into the virgin soil of those hundreds of *chüan* (卷) of bone-dry documents without the help of an index. Yet it is a great thrill to be able to present a systematic study of

the confusing policy of the Manchu government in suppressing the Moslem rebellion in Shensi, Kansu and Sinkiang from 1862-1878.

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University of Pittsburgh
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Wen-djang Chu
(朱文長)

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