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Xinjiang's Population of the pre-Turkic Age in Light of Chinese Archeology and Historical Sources

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Xinjiang, the westernmost province of China, is one of the least known yet most diverse areas of Central Asia. Though today it is a Chinese province, it has a Turkic (Uyghur) ethnic tradition; its history reaches back to prehistoric (pre-Turkic) times. Much of the literature about its people and its history was written in Chinese; few—if any—scholarly publications appeared in the West about early human activity in Xinjiang, specifically of its pre-Turkic period.

It is the purpose of this study is to list the population types and movements in Xinjiang from the neolithic to the beginning of the Turkic period. The data and the conclusions are based on modern Chinese archeological research as well as on ancient Chinese and Western historical records. Many peoples lived—as they still do—in this huge territory. The study will also try to shed light upon where these peoples could have come from and who the descendents of some of these peoples are today.

The Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region covers more than 1,709,400 square kilometres of approximately one sixth of China's total landmass, and is by far the biggest of the country's regions and provinces. It occupies much of the sparsely-populated Northwest. Besides the Uygur ethnic group, Chinese Han, Kazakh, Hui (Chinese Muslim), Mongol, Kirgiz, Tajik, Xibe, Uzbek, Manchu, Daur, Tatar and Russian peoples live in Xinjiang today. The Uygurs, numbering 7,214,431, account for three-fifths of the total population (NSCC 1990, see also DÉCSY 1988.45–46). The region is bounded by the Altay Mountains in the north, the Pamirs in the west, and the Karakoram Mountains, Altun Mountains and Kunlun Mountains in the south. The Tianshan Mountains bisect Xinjiang into northern and southern parts and very different climates and landscapes. Southern Xinjiang includes the Tarim Basin and the Taklimakan Desert, China's largest, while northern Xinjiang contains the Junggar Basin. The Turpan Basin, the hottest and lowest point in China, lies at the eastern end of the Tianshan Mountains. The Tarim, Yarkant, Yurunkax and Qarran Rivers irrigate the land around the Tarim Basin, while the Ili, Irtish, Ulungur and Manas Rivers flow through arable and pastoral areas in northern Xinjiang.

A number of anthropologists think that Xinjiang can not be one of the

original homelands of *Homo sapiens* since up to now, no paleolithic sites or implements have been found (HAN KANGXIN 1991). But Xinjiang did experience a neolithic age with an economy based on animal husbandry and hunting (MU & WANG 1985.1).

The history of Xinjiang can be divided into two periods: the pre-Turkic period and Turkic period. During the 8th and 9th centuries, a large number of Turkic speaking people moved into the south of Xinjiang and after about 300 years, in about the 11th century, the Turkic languages replaced the aboriginal local languages in both southern and northern Xinjiang (GENG 1982.259).

Although quite a lot of information about the populations of this period has been recorded in old Chinese documents, and many human physical remains and artifacts have been excavated and scientifically studied by Chinese scholars for many years, the western world has paid little attention to both historical documents and Chinese scientific research. This resulted in gross omissions concerning the history, the identity and movement of ancient populations in the Central Asian region. It also resulted in the formulation of conclusions based on inaccurate use of, or incomplete consideration of, scientific data.

In light of this we offer a survey of the major prehistoric periods in Xinjiang for which both archeological and documentary data are available from China.

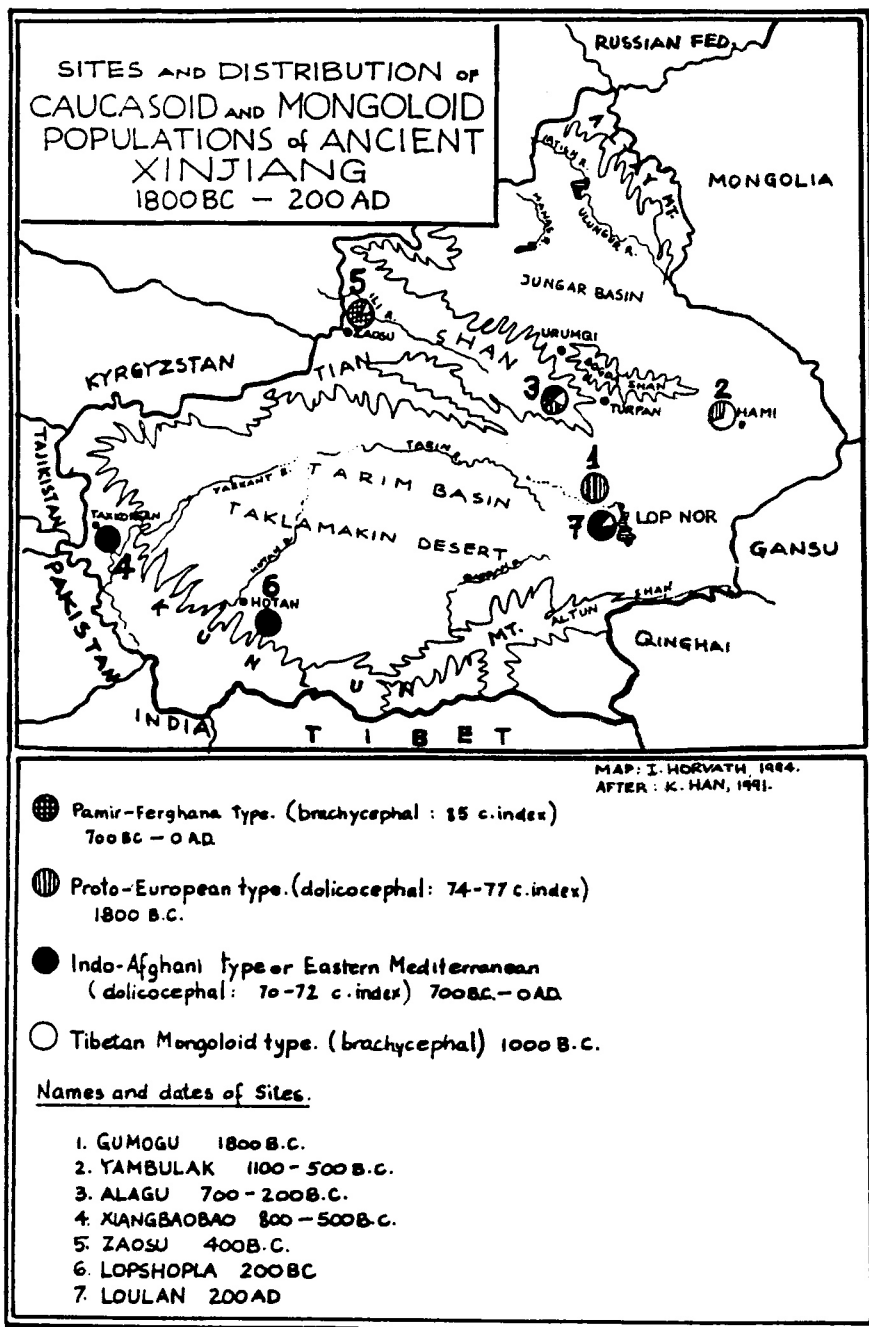
From the Neolithic to the Western Zhou Period (5000-1000 B.C.)

The oldest archeological site in Xinjiang was found near the Qijiaoqing village, Hami county, the eastern part of the province. It is 7,000 to 8,000 years old. This site tells us that people already lived there during that time. Archeologists found several thousand microliths including blade-tools, stone knives, and stone arrows, boat-shaped cores, and stone axes. A great number of these kinds of microliths were also found from neolithic sites in the Turpan and Lop Nor area, from Urumqi, and from the border areas of the Tarim Basin. After quantifying examinations it was found that most of them were long, thin blade-tools (MU & WANG 1985.2). The tools have the same characteristics as the contemporary or earlier stone implements found in Qinghai, Gansu, Ningxia and Inner Mongolia.

Furthermore, these types of stone tools were also found in the eastern and northern parts of Asia, as well as western and northern America. Some boat-shaped stone cores from Xinjiang are almost the same as those found in Shaanxi, Hebei, and Henan provinces. It seems therefore, that the stone assemblages found in the above areas belong to one system which is quite different from the microliths in western and southern Asia, Australia, Europe, and Africa (WANG 1985.38).

From these facts we can infer that during the neolithic there were already a distinctly independent cultural sphere as well as widespread cultural connections and relationships among the early inhabitants of Xinjiang and

the people who lived in the upper reaches of the Yellow River, northern Asia, and even North America. However such cultural distribution does not necessarily imply uniformity of human physical types.



Map 1.

In the 1970's, a royal tomb from the Shang dynasty was found in Anyang county, Henan province. The occupant of the tomb is Emperor Wuding's wife, Fuhao. The 756 jade pieces found in the tomb are 3,200 years old. According to the examinations by geologists from the Academia Sinica the jade pieces came from the south of Xinjiang (WANG 1985.41). This is further evidence of the extensive economic connections that existed between Xinjiang and Central Plain of China as early as 1200 B.C.

Xinjiang was called simply the "Western Region" in ancient times by Chinese Han people (Han dynasty: ca 200 BC - 200 AD), and a good many Chinese historical documents contain information about this area. The documentation started as early as the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256 B.C.). "The Book of Shang", one of the Confucian classics, the "Shan Hai Jing" ("The Book of Mountains and Seas", an ancient geographical work), and the "Spring and Autumn of Lu" (an anthology of pre-Qin thinkers compiled by Lu Buwei), all mention the Western Region. The "Yu Gong", a chapter from the "Book of Shang" refers to the "jade of Kun Mountains," suggesting that jade was already being sent to the Central Plain from southern Xinjiang (MA 1989.138).

One story goes that about 964 B.C., the Chinese emperor Zhou Mu Wang led a great entourage, including a large orchestra, to the Western Region to visit the people there. He met the local queen named Xi Wang Mu and they held a great party, and even sang songs together (YANG 1981.40).

These documents illustrate the active awareness and relationship between China's Central Plain and the Western Region, and although there were no human remains found in the earliest neolithic sites, human skeletons and even mummies¹ were found in later sites (MU & WANG 1985.3). In 1979, archeologists of Xinjiang excavated 42 graves in the Gumugou cemetery from the lower reaches of the Peacock River, near Lop Nor (see Map 1 for this and successive sites mentioned). This cemetery is 3,800 years old according to C 14 tests. 18 skulls (11 men and 7 women) were found in the cemetery. HAN KANGXIN, working at the Institute of Archeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing), studied these skulls and determined that these people have similar features to the Proto-European physical type (also called Cro Magnon C type), exhibiting dolichoacrocrahy (long-headedness), but having relatively shorter faces (see Table 1 at the end of the article on p. 108). These people's physical characteristics are similar, but not the same as those of the Afanasievo and Andronovo cultures from the upper Ob and Irtysh Rivers regions in Siberia, dated to 3000-1000 B.C. This is the oldest archeologically attested popula-

¹The so-called Xinjiang Mummies (see article in April issue of Discover, 1994) are not members of a single population, nor do they date to the same time period. The various bodies were unearthed in a number of Xinjiang sites dating from 1800 BC to 200 BC. They have yet to be studied by either Chinese or Western scholars. Thus, any conclusions concerning their more exact physical type and cultural affinity is yet to be determined. Han Kangxin, personal communications.)

tion of Xinjiang to date (HAN 1991).

However, early appearance of certain Mongoloids was not far behind. Twenty-nine early skulls were found in Yanbulake cemetery of Liushuquan (Willow Spring) village, Hami county in eastern Xinjiang. The age of this cemetery falls between 1100 to 500 B.C. According to HAN's research, there are 21 skulls showing Mongoloid characteristics, dolichocrany (long headedness) as well as chamaecrany (short head shape), which are close in appearance to the head shapes of today's eastern Tibetans, but differ from the Continental Mongoloid characteristics. The other 8 skulls show characteristics of the previously discussed Proto-European types found in the Gumugou cemetery near Lop Nor.

From the above data, it is evident that already clearly distinguishable types of populations were living in various areas of Xinjiang as early as 3,000 years ago. Some were Caucasoids, already specific to Central Asia, others Mongoloid.

From the Western Zhou to the Western Han Dynastic Period (ca. 1000 B.C. to 0).

Zhang Qian, who lived in the second century BC, went beyond the Western Region as an official envoy between 138 and 119 BC, further strengthening ties between China's Central Plain and Central Asia via the "Silk Road". In 60 B.C., Emperor Xuan Di of the Western Han Dynasty established the office of Governor of the Western Region to supervise the "36 states" north and south of the Tianshan Mountains with the westernmost border running through areas east and south of Lake Balkhash and the Pamirs (YU 1985.42 and 44). Partially due to more frequent contacts between the Han court and the Western Region, there were more extensive records kept about Xinjiang during the Han dynasty than from earlier times.

According to the Historical Records of the Western Han Dynasty, the inhabitants of the Northern Xinjiang were a group of people called "Yunrong". Today archeologists have identified them as Saka. Herodotus called the nomads who invaded the Caucasus area around 800 B.C. Scythians (MMA 1976.130). The Saka were one of the many tribes of Scythians who populated today's Turkestan and Kazakhstan, writes Herodotus; however he admits the Greeks knew little of the people who lived to the east of the Saka (BASILOV 1989.19).

The Han history books recorded that these people called "Yunrong" (who today are identified as the Saka), originally lived around Dunhuang, in the western area of today's Gansu province. When the Rouzhe (another group who lived in the Hexi Corridor in Gansu), began their move, the Saka were squeezed west (SSAX 1980.12). It is significant here that Herodotus notes down several legends about the origin of the Scythians, but mentions that the most believable for him is the account claiming that the Scythians came to the areas situated around the Black Sea from the east, that is, Asia (MMA 1957.131-2).

It seems the Chinese chronicles and the records of Herodotus coincide in detail, and both agree that a groups of nomadic peoples moved westward from Asia. However, the Chinese records give us a more accurate location for their place of origin as it was known at that time: northern Xinjiang.

In light of this it is worthwhile to see if archeology can help us. There are three cemeteries of this period (HAN 1991) we need to pay attention to. These are the Tianshan Alagou cemetery near Turpan (700-0 B.C.), the Luoposhanpola cemetery (200 B.C.) in the southwestern edge of the Taklimakan Desert, and the Xiangbaobao cemetery located in the Tajik autonomous county in the Pamis (800-500 B.C.).

58 skulls (33 men and 25 women) were found in the Tianshan Alagou cemetery (700 B.C. to the beginning of our era). 85% of these were Caucasoids, belonging to two different sub-types (see Table 1): the first is the Indo-Afghani (also called East Mediterranean) type. These people exhibit dolichoacrocrahy, and the crania are similar to those of the Saka which were found in the southern area of the Pamir, in the former USSR, dated to the 6th century B.C. Another type is close in appearance to the Pamir-Ferghana round-headed type. This type can also be identified in Saka cemeteries, thus making the Saka a heterogeneous group. It seems that even though some of the Saka have been recorded to have fought in Asia Minor against the Persians and other groups around the middle of the first millenium B.C., there were other Saka groups in existence in Kazakhstan and even as far as Xinjiang in the 7-6th centuries B.C. The Pamir-Ferghana brachycephalic physical characteristic is also dominant in today's Uyгур population, which partially answer the question as to what became of the Saka. In the cemetery a number of individuals of the Mongoloid race were also found from these times.

The Luoposhanpola (200 B.C.) cemetery has collective or mass burials and 56 skeletons were unearthed there. These individuals were of the Indo-Afghani type.

Of the 40 graves in the Xiangbaobao cemetery (800-500 B.C.), 21 of the burials were inhumational and 19 cremational. Only one intact skull was found in Xiangbaobao inhumational graves and it is similar to the Indo-Afghani type.

As for the cremational graves, archeologists believe they belonged to the Mongoloid Qiang people, since the Qiang are known to have had this burial custom (MU & WANG 1985 7).

According to the the above data it seems that the recorded information in the ancient Chinese historical documents regarding the Yunrong (Saka) was quite accurate, as is the accounts of Herodotus: The Saka (Scythians) arrived from Asia. Now we know it was at least as far east as northern Xinjiang and moving westward eventually they reached the Caucasus area. Archeology further reveals that even as early as the 8-7th centuries B.C., they were not homogenous. There were the Indo-Afghani types and the Pamir-Ferghana types, and more detailed observation may reveal even some

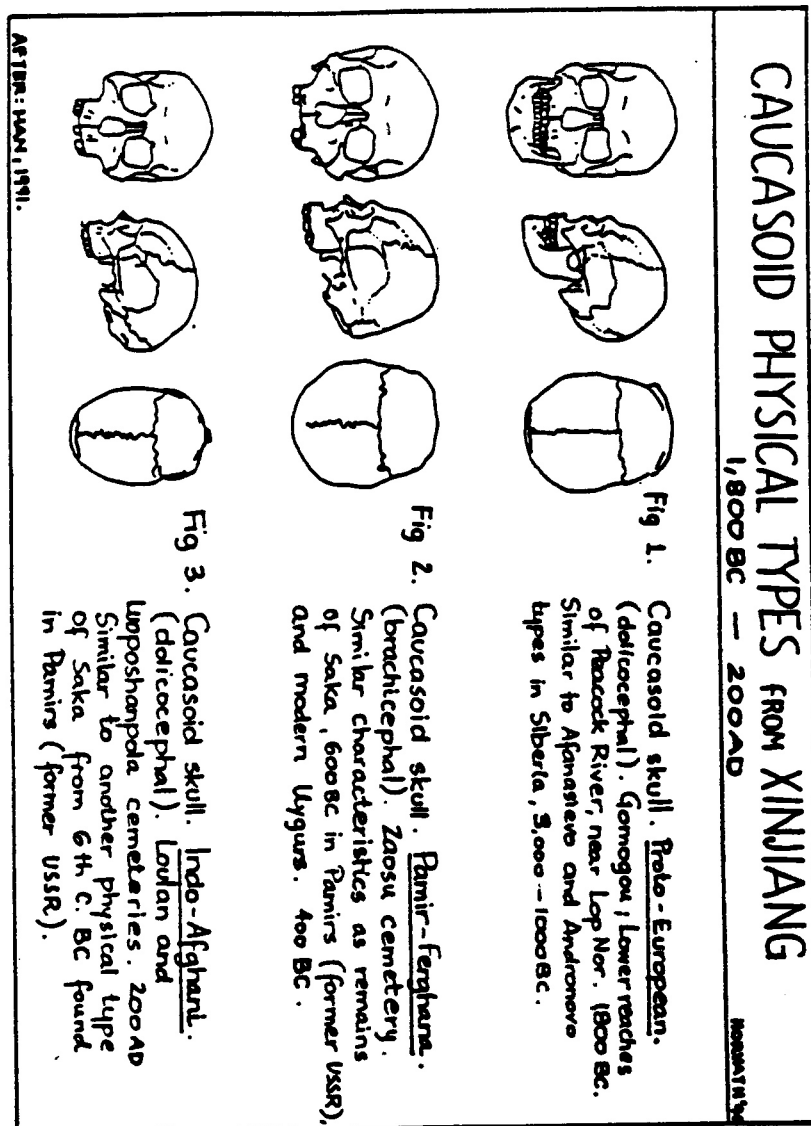


Table 1.

Mongoloid groups. Though primarily they may be Caucasoids, no remains of contemporary western European variations among them have so far been discovered. Even the Asian Cro-Magnonoids of the Andronovo from the early part of the second millenia no longer seem to be dominant by the 8th century B.C. This time period roughly coincides with the appearance of the Scythians in the Caucasus as recorded by Herodotus.

If we say that disagreements and arguments abound as to the identity and origin of the Scythians, no less can be said of the Rhouzi and the

Wusun. However, the Chinese chronicles and local archeology of late can shed light on the identity of these people.

The activities of the Xiongnu (Asian Huns) further altered the population dynamics of Xinjiang. Han dynastic chronicles tell us that at the end of the third century B.C. the Rouzhi moved into Northern Xinjiang from the Hexi corridor because of increased Xiongnu attacks from the east. The Rouzhi then moved to occupy Sakas territories. Some Sakas followed their king and moved to the south, while others remained in northern Xinjiang. The ones who moved crossed the Pamir and arrived in today's Kashmir (SSAX 1985.26). When the Xiongnu attacked the Rouzhi again in 177-176 B.C., the Rouzhi had to move to the reaches of the Amu Darya River, occupying Bactria. We know about the movements of these peoples because Sima Qian, the Grand Historian of the Han Dynasty tells us that at this time, Modu (Mao Tun) Shanyu (Xiongnu emperor) wrote a letter to Liu Huan, the emperor of the Western Han dynasty, notifying him that after the last Xiongnu attack, the Loulan, the Wusun, the Hujie and 26 other kingdoms of the Western Region were conquered territories and were henceforth ruled by the Xiongnu (SIMA 1992.143).

The Wusun, say the Han history books, originated in the Hexi Corridor, as did the Rouzhi, between the Qilan Mountains and Dunhuang. The Xiongnu-Wusun allied forces attacked the Rouzhi and proceeded to move into the Ili River Valley and around the area of Issyk Kul (IMH, 1977.68). Some of the Kazakh tribes even today are called Wusun, and are considered to be, and consider themselves to be, the descendants of the Wusun (MA 1989.159).

A number of Wusun and Saka cemeteries were found in Zhaosu county, in the upper reaches of the Ili River. The cemeteries are dated between 400 BC to 200 A.D. 13 skulls (7 men and 6 women) were unearthed here. Two of the skulls were judged to be Saka, while the others were found in Wusuns graves. HAN KANGXIN examined these skulls and found there were no significant differences between the Saka and the Wusun. Among these remains, two female skulls show very strong Mongoloid characteristics, while the others belong to the round-headed Pamir-Fergana type. These share similar characteristics with the contemporary Saka and Wusun skulls found in other parts of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan.

What the ancient bones cannot tell us, the Chinese chronicles recorded. Yan Shigu, a writer living in the Tang dynasty described the physical characteristics of the Wusun people. He wrote: "They are quite different from other minorities living in the Western Region. Today's minorities who have green eyes and red beards, just like monkeys, are the descendants of the Wusuns" (BAN 1962.3901). According to the Historical Book of the Tang Dynasty, "the Jiankun people are tall and have white hair, white skin and green eyes. They (Jiankun) think that people with black hair are not propitious and are considered to be the descendants of Li Ling". Note that Li Ling was a general of the Western Han dynasty, who capitulated to

the Xiongnu, and became a Xiongnu officer who ruled over the Jiankun (OUYANG 1975.6147).

Thus, from the Tang historical records which confirm the archeological data, we can see that the Wusun and the Saka were, at least in part, of the Pamir-Ferghana type Caucasoid stock. Furthermore, the modern populations of Uyghurs and Kazakhs to a great degree share the same physical characteristic (round head) shape, light hair, and light brown, sometime, green, eyes.

These variants look back upon a formidable local history (clearly distinct variants are present at least as early as 800 B.C.), and so far no anthropological evidence exists that could warrant the conclusion (see the American journal *Discover*, 1994 April issue) that these groups were contemporary immigrants from western Europe. A possible origin for these early Xinjiang inhabitants from western Europe seems all the more unlikely since the two geographic areas already evolved markedly different human types and cultures much earlier than the time periods under discussion here.

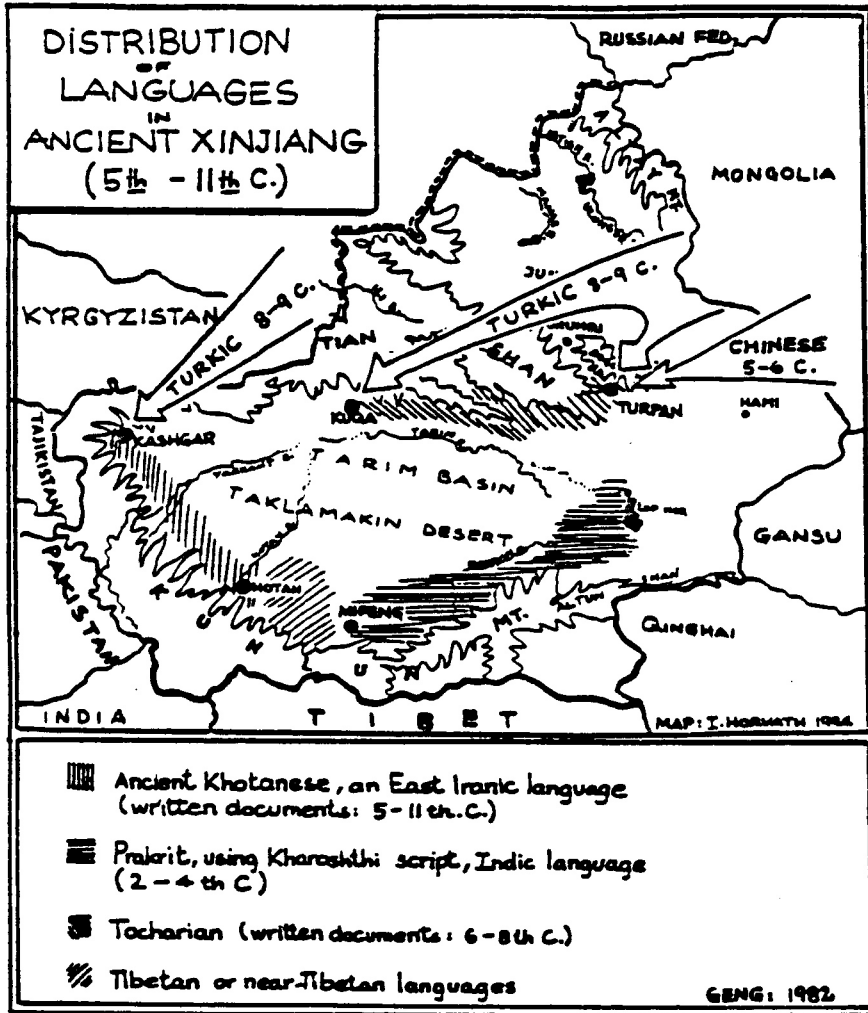
From the Eastern Han to the Tang Dynasty (ca. 0-1000 A.D.)

At the beginning of the first century A.D. Xinjiang was ruled by the Xiongnu (YU 1985.45), which means the Xiongnu had already moved into the area before and during that time (HAN 1991). Some Xiongnu skulls found in the Outer Baikal area bear the Ancient Siberian (paleosibirid) physical characteristics. Other Xiongnu human remains found in Inner Mongolia and Qinghai also belong to the Mongoloid race. The Xiongnu skulls found in Xinjiang (Tianshan Alagou) however, do not have strong Mongoloid characteristics, but exhibit strong Caucasoid features of the round-headed Pamir-Fergana type. According to this fact, HAN believes that the Xiongnu were originally Mongoloid and after they moved to Xinjiang, they mixed with the local people such as the round-headed Caucasoid Saka and Wusun and show marked Caucasoid characteristics (HAN 1991).

The relatively uniform continuity of the local human variants can be followed through time. The cemetery found in the eastern suburb of the ancient city of Loulan is dated around 200 A.D. 6 skulls (3 men, 2 women and one child) were found. According to HAN's study, among these skulls only one shows clear Mongoloid characteristics while the others exhibit Caucasoid features. These Caucasoids are similar to the long-headed Indo-Afghani types, and to those groups of ancient Saka heads which were found in a cemetery in the Southern area of the Pamir in former USSR, dated to the 6th century B.C., as well as to the Wusun.

The Chinese history books continue to describe these people in terms that are similar to earlier records. The History of the Northern Dynasties recorded in its entry on Khotan: "the people in the states west of Turpan all have deep-set eyes and high noses, but in this country (Khotan), the people

do not like minorities from the Western Region". (LI 1962.3209.) This record certainly provides us a lively picture of the physical characteristics of the people living in the 5th and 6th centuries AD in southern Xinjiang.



Map 2.

In the fourth century, the Rouran (Avar) became strong and occupied some areas of northern Xinjiang. In the sixth century the Turks rose, and overthrew the Rouran, ruling over Rouran territory (IMH 1977.101, 120). Some scholars think that at that time and even before, Turkic was already spoken in northern Xinjiang (MIN 1935).

This brings us to the question of languages spoken in ancient Xinjiang. The ancient language situation in southern Xinjiang has been researched by many Chinese scholars. GEN SHIMIN has published many papers on this topic. From his research, based on the available written records, we disco-

ver that a number of specific languages were spoken in Southern Xinjiang (see Map II, p. 104).

In the area around Khotan and Maralbashi (also possibly including Kashgar), a medieval Eastern Iranian language was used, that resembles today's Tajik, still spoken by the people who live in the Tajik autonomous county in Xinjiang (GENG 1982.263). This language is called Ancient Khotanese and its written documents date from the 5th to the 11th centuries (JI 1988.466).

In about the 2nd to the 4th centuries in the area from Minfeng (Niya) to Lop Nor a language called Prakrit was spoken. It used the Kharoshthi writing system, while in localities east of Khotan one or more Tibetan or near-Tibetan languages were used.

In the north of the Tarim around Kucha, Karashahr and Turpan, people spoke Tocharian (GENG 1980.263). This language is called Ancient Karashahr-Kuchanese and its position within the Indo-European family still needs to be studied (JI 1988.390). The written Tocharian documents date from the 6th to the 8th centuries, roughly contemporary with the ancient Turkic inscriptions. At this moment we can say that the origin of the Tocharian language and its position is as mysterious as the origin of Turkish.

Besides the distant relatives of the Iranian and Indic languages mentioned above, some written documents in Sogdian (6th century) and Turkic (7th-8th centuries) were also found in Xinjiang (JI 1980.375 and 385). Hence it stands to reason, think a number of scholars, that these languages were also spoken in Xinjiang at that time.

During the 5th and 6th centuries increasing numbers of Chinese were living in the Turpan region, Chinese language and Chinese characters were starting to be used in the area (LI 1962.3215).

After the 8th and 9th centuries AD, because large numbers of Turkic-speaking Uyghurs entered the Turpan and Kucha area to the north, and other large numbers of Turkic-speaking Kharlukh moved to the Kashgar region to the south, the linguistic and social situation began to change (LIN 1988.207).

The linguistic evidence here again shows no western European connections. Archaic Indic and Iranian languages were spoken along with Tocharian, which still has to be satisfactorily classified.

Conclusion

Currently, there are no paleolithic sites or implements found in Xinjiang, and it seems Xinjiang is not one of the original homelands of *Homo sapiens*. At least in the chalcolithic age (period between neolithic and bronze age), some Caucasoid people of the Proto-European type, otherwise known as the Cro-Magnoid C, already moved into the Lop Nor area.

The data suggest that as early as the 8th century before our era, or maybe even earlier, another branch of Caucasoids, similar to the Indo-Afghani type entered western Xinjiang from Central Asia. Those people

moved from west to east (Xiangbaobao cemetery, Louposhanpola cemetery, Loulan cemetery) through the southern edge of the Tarim Basin and arrived in Lop Nor, and met the Proto-European people who had settled there earlier. Other Indo-Afghani types came to the Tianshan mountain area via the northern edge of the Tarim Basin and found earlier Proto-European arrivals (Alagou cemetery).

About the same time round-headed Caucasoids also appeared in the upper reaches of the Ili River and even in the Tianshan area (Zhaosu and Alagou cemeteries). They exhibit the Pamir-Fergan physical characteristics.

The earliest Mongoloid people appeared at about 3,000 years BP, or earlier, but only in eastern Xinjiang (Yanbulak cemetery of Hami county). It was somewhat later when large numbers of Mongoloid people moved westward but probably not earlier than 207 B.C., when the Han dynasty came to power. After that time, the Xiongnu occupied Xinjiang and a great many Mongoloid people entered the area.

Although the Caucasoids moved from the west and even perhaps from the southwest, as far away as Mesopotamia (a number of groups exhibited similar Caucasoid physical characteristics as the early Xinjiang group, namely the round headed variety), some of them eventually moved westward again to be known as Rouzhi and Wusun. The Chinese and Greek historians call them by different names but archeology suggests that these people can be identified with the Saka and Wusun, since the Saka, one of the Scythian tribes, and the Wusun exhibit very similar physical characteristics. Those populations who did not move westward—and there were those who remained, as the Chinese chronicles suggest—absorbed other groups and gave rise to parts of the Uigur and Kazakh peoples. The archeological evidence and the documents support each other. The historical descriptions and the human remains through time are consistent enough to warrant the above conclusions. A number of scholars have suggested Indo-European and Germanic migrations from as far as western Europe (Discover, 1994), whence came the populations who carried early Iron Age cultural elements as far east as the Ordos grasslands (HEINE-GELDERN 1951). In light of the above discussion based on recent Chinese archeological evidence as well as historical records these theories cannot be substantiated. To date, no data exist that would allow us to conclude waves of western European immigration that could have given rise to these early Xinjiang populations.

We also saw from linguistic research that no European languages were spoken in ancient Xinjiang. Documentary evidence of the written languages of quite recent periods (5th to 11th centuries) are all languages that show similarity to the Iranic and Indic languages. Tocharian is still problematic, while other languages belong to the Altaic (Turkic) and Sino-Tibetan (Chinese, Tibetan) language families.

This report hoped to demonstrate that some clarification as to the identity of certain groups in ancient Xinjiang can be achieved by considering the

results of both western and Chinese scholarship, as well as paying attention to western and eastern historical records. By following the archeological records we can also know what happened to some of these populations through time and what present populations can claim descent from at least some of the early Xinjiang groups. Further study along these lines as well as using the data from other disciplines, such as art history, comparative ethnomusicology, ethnography, and folklore, will surely reveal more details as to the origin, life style, movements, and eventual fate of the ancient peoples of Xinjiang.

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