

Historical Geographical and Political Boundaries and Natural Conditions of The State of Ettishahar

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The historical development of East Turkestan in the 19th century is pivotal in understanding the geopolitical dynamics of Central Asia. One significant episode is the rise of the Seven Cities State under Muhammad Yakubbek, formed after consolidating various khanates in East Turkestan amidst regional instability and external imperial interests. **Method:** This article aims to explore the geographical, political, and administrative structure of the Seven Cities State, its defense strategy, internal governance, and diplomatic efforts to preserve sovereignty against major powers. **Result:** The study reveals that Muhammad Yakubbek effectively unified the region, structured the state into hierarchical provinces, revived traditional governance mechanisms, and sought international recognition while navigating pressures from Russia, China, and Britain. The research offers a multi-layered analysis of the state's administration, integration strategies, and Muhammad Yakubbek's pragmatic diplomacy, based on a synthesis of historical narratives. **Novelty:** The findings highlight the fragile nature of emerging states in contested borderlands and underscore the role of geopolitical foresight, regional alliances, and administrative reform in state survival during imperial rivalries.

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Seven-City State, founded by Muhammad Yakubbek in East Turkestan during the mid-19th century, remains one of the least explored yet geopolitically significant events in Central Asian history [1]. Despite the availability of various foreign sources—Russian, Chinese, and Uyghur—the narrative remains fragmented and often biased, necessitating a balanced scholarly investigation. This article seeks to provide a comprehensive account of the state's emergence, political boundaries, and governance structures, emphasizing Muhammad Yakubbek's strategic consolidation of fragmented khanates such as Kashgar, Yorkand, and Khotan into a unified administrative entity [2]. Amid rising tensions with regional powers such as the Manchu Dynasty, Russia, and the British Empire, the Seven-City State represented a fragile yet ambitious effort at asserting political autonomy and establishing internal governance in a time of imperial contestation. The paper contextualizes these developments within the broader international power struggle that enveloped East Turkestan, portraying Muhammad Yakubbek as a resilient leader navigating complex diplomatic and military challenges [3].

RESEARCH METHOD

The methods employed in this study center on a qualitative and historical-descriptive approach to reconstruct the geographical, administrative, and political context of the Seven-City State (Yettishahar), founded by Muhammad Yakubbek. The research draws upon a wide array of historical sources, including archival materials, Russian academic publications, and Uyghur and Chinese documentation, to analyze and interpret the formation, governance, and strategic diplomacy of this unique state in 19th-century East Turkestan [4]. By synthesizing these diverse materials, the study identifies the administrative structures, military campaigns, regional integrations, and foreign policy maneuvers undertaken by Yakubbek. It traces the expansion of the state through military conquest and political alliances, maps its internal administrative reforms including the provincial division system, and evaluates the state's foreign diplomatic efforts with powers like Russia, China, and Britain [5]. Special emphasis is given to analyzing how historical geography influenced political decisions and how natural conditions and border dynamics shaped state-building efforts. The study does not rely on contemporary fieldwork but instead conducts critical textual analysis of published historical texts and government records. It also considers contrasting interpretations across sources to mitigate bias and reconstruct a more balanced narrative. The collected data were systematically categorized and interpreted to reflect both temporal developments and thematic connections. This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical significance of the Seven-City State in the broader context of Central Asian power struggles, empire interactions, and regional diplomacy during the late 19th century [6].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A comprehensive study of the history of the Seven-City State (1865-1878), founded by Muhammad Yakubbek of Pskent, has not yet been carried out in our country [7]. However, although several books have been published abroad based on Russian archival documents, Chinese and Uyghur sources, the information in them is considered to be one-sided. In particular, the studies of M. Gavrilov, D. Tikhonov, Chen Sulo, B. Shahidi, D. Isiev, A. Khodjaev, Kim Khodong mainly provide information about the administrative and political system, geographical conditions, economic life and external relations of the Seven-City State. After this event, which occurred in the fall of 1865, Buzrukhodja returned to Kashgar and again took his throne. However, he ascended the throne as a khan, who could not act without the consent of Muhammad Yakubbek [8]. After that, the internal situation in the Kashgar Khanate calmed down, and favorable conditions were created for the unification of East Turkestan.

Over a period of more than a year, until the summer of 1867, Muhammad Yakubbek made several military campaigns and united the Kuchar, Yorkand, and Kashgar Khanates. This event strengthened his authority and position in the country. After that, he gave Buzrukhodja a thousand gold coins and ordered him to go on a pilgrimage, completely taking over state affairs [9].

The state formed on the basis of the three khanates was called the Seven-City State. Because this state included seven cities of East Turkestan, including Kashgar, Yorkand, Khotan, Aksu, Uchturfan, Kuchar, and Karashahar.

After annexing the Kuchar Khanate to the Kashgar Khanate, Muhammad Yakubbek focused his efforts on subjugating the Tungan Khanate, which had the city of Urumqi as its center. At the same time, the leaders of this khanate were trying to unite with the Tungus who were fighting against the Manchus in the western regions of China and to liberate the strategically important provinces of East Turkestan, such as Turfan, Kumul, and Barkul. The Manchu government, on the other hand, was trying to keep these provinces in its hands as much as possible and use them as a base for future military operations. Because if these lands were lost, the East Turkestans, with a small force, would occupy important points on the mountain and desert road connecting them with China, and the Manchus would not be able to give them the opportunity to throw sufficient force at them. Although the Urumqi Khanate resisted fiercely, it was eventually forced to submit to Muhammad Yakubbek.

Having included the Urumqi Khanate within the Seven Cities State, Muhammad Yakubbek called the Ili Sultanate to obedience and did a lot in this regard. In 1871, the Sultanate collapsed when Russian troops occupied the Ili Valley. Any further action could have led to a clash with Russian troops. It was not advisable to clash with Russian troops while trying to establish contact with the Russian government. Understanding this well, Muhammad Yakubbek refused to include the Ili Valley in the Seven Cities State. In 1877, Muhammad Yakubbek also included the city of Turfan and its surrounding areas in the Seven Cities State. Then he stopped his army and did not try to take places such as Kumul and Borkul. Because Manchus who had fled from various cities of East Turkestan and the Chinese who followed them had gathered in these places. Raising an army against them was tantamount to waging war against the Manchu dynasty. It is likely that Muhammad Yakubbek did not want to clash with this dynasty. Because he knew that it was impossible to save the Seven Cities State, which was just getting back on its feet, by waging war against the Manchus. Thus, within 4-5 years after arriving in Kashgar, Muhammad Yakubbek united the main part of East Turkestan and created conditions for its economic and political development.

After the unification of the khanates that emerged in East Turkestan as a result of the uprising against the Manchus, Muhammad Yakubbek divided the Seven-City State into 17 large and small provinces, among which the provinces centered on the cities of Kashgar, Yorkand, Khotan, Aksuv, Uchturfan, Boy, Kuchor, Kurla, Turfan, Urumqi, and Manas were given the status of first-class provinces, and the rest were given the status of second-class provinces. Each province was divided into several towns and villages, and these provinces were administered by governors appointed by Muhammad Yakubbek. The governors were granted all rights regarding military, economic, and social issues within their provinces, and each of them was considered the supreme ruler of a province. Each governor was obliged to act in obedience to the orders of Muhammad Yakubbek and to use the army under his command in case of war. Each region had a court of the

Khokimbek, which included officials such as the qaziaskar, qazikalon, qazi rais, rais, batirbashi, bas sarkarda, amirlashkar, lashkarbashi, toksoba, pansot, yuuzbashi, ellikbashi, onbashi, mirzo, mahram, mirshab, mirab, and kokbashi. Therefore, the defense facilities within the state, border protection, were directly under the control of Muhammad Yakubbek through the officials appointed as their heads.

The state was governed not on the basis of a special law, but on the basis of the decrees of Muhammad Yakubbek. Order in society was established on the basis of Sharia through disciplinary judges and qazi kalons. Violators of order were also punished through them.

In terms of managing state affairs, Muhammad Yakubbek restored the ministerial system of the period of the Yorkand Khanate, which was traditional for East Turkestan. It is known that during this khanate, there were palace officials such as the grand vizier, amir al-umra, muhrdar, divanibegi, sheikhul-islam, parvanachi, mirayu, and amir. Their tasks were clearly defined. Based on the work of Muhammad Yakubbek in this area, it can be concluded that his style of state management was traditional and highly improved [10].

In order to provide for the officials under his control, Muhammad Yakubbek introduced the suyurgol system. Officials were given a part of the tax revenue from the population of the lands given as suyurgol. Lower-ranking officials were provided with various taxes from the people. Those who served in the army were also provided with land, water, food, and money.

When Muhammad Yakubbek came to power in Eastern Turkestan, there was an extremely difficult situation in all of Turkestan. While on the one hand, chaos, infighting, and massacres reigned in this region, on the other hand, Russian troops were taking full advantage of the situation, strengthening the position of the Russian government there and expanding its sphere of influence. In 1867, the court of General Kaufman, the representative of the Russian government, was established in Tashkent, and he was granted great rights. In 1868, the ruler of the Kokand Khanate, Khudoyar Khan, was forced to accept Russia's terms and conclude an agreement with it. In the same year, the Bukhara Khanate was also subordinated to Russia. After that, the Russian army was mobilized to the Khiva Khanate. At the same time, England was trying to occupy Afghanistan, organize a united force against Russia in Central Asia, and limit Russia's position there. At the same time, the British were monitoring the situation in East Turkestan and trying to thwart their plans to bring this country under their influence. Therefore, the Central Asian khanates, which were in a difficult situation, were busy with themselves and did not have the opportunity to provide serious assistance to East Turkestan [11]. Although at that time China, England, France, Portugal, Japan, Russia, Germany, America had come under the influence of developed countries and had become semi-independent states, the Manchu dynasty ruling in China was able to suppress internal uprisings and retain the territories conquered in the 17th and 18th centuries, such as Tibet, Mongolia, and East Turkestan. As we have seen, when Muhammad Yakubbek came to power, there were three major powers around East

Turkestan, which, in physics, formed a large triangle. Although they were connected to each other on the one hand, their interests were opposed to each other on the other, and if any of the edges of this triangle were not connected correctly, it was certain that a huge stone would fall on East Turkestan again. In such a situation, conducting business properly would require great intelligence, insight, and deep knowledge from the person in charge of the state here [12].

Taking into account the large forces around East Turkestan and the international situation, Muhammad Yakubbek pondered the problems of defending the Seven-City State and its future attack by the Manchurian troops and took the necessary measures. The author of these lines, Muhammad Yakubbek, discussed this in detail in his book "The Manchu Empire, Dzungaria and East Turkestan", published in Russian in Moscow in 1979. As a mature military and political figure, Muhammad Yakubbek understood the current situation and opportunities of East Turkestan, as well as the fact that the Manchu government was preparing for war against the Seven-City State by suppressing the uprisings in China, and that the newly formed, relatively small Seven-City State was not capable of resisting the attack of a large state like the Manchu (Chinese) Empire, which had a significant advantage in terms of finances and the number of its army. He developed a strategy and tactics for solving these problems. According to Muhammad Yakubbek, the only way to preserve the Seven Cities was to conclude a peace treaty with the Manchu government through the mediation of major powers, establish diplomatic relations with it, and have it recognize its own state. However, although Muhammad Yakubbek's idea was correct, it was clear that it would not come true. Because the Manchu dynasty preferred to take into account the centuries-old experience of Chinese khagans and the advice of court officials [13]. The Manchus aimed not to lose East Turkestan, a rich and large region that connected China with Turkestan and other Western countries. In this regard, they implemented the idea of the Manchu Khagan Jianlung, who led the conquest of East Turkestan in 1755-1759, that if we want to conquer this country (East Turkestan) and keep this land in our hands forever, we must eliminate its state system and heirs to the throne and introduce the administrative system traditional for China. Based on this, the Manchu emperor and court officials, who ruled in the third quarter of the 19th century, decided to destroy this state. At the same time, this task was entrusted to Zuo Zungton, an experienced and prominent Chinese official who actively participated in suppressing the movement of the Chinese people against the Manchus at that time and was closely connected with foreign capital. He was given a large sum of money and strength, as well as the authority and power to carry out the special instructions of the khagan. However, it was impossible to fulfill this task. Because at that time, or rather until 1873, the continuation of the struggle against the Manchus in the western regions of China was binding on Zuo Zungton's army. Unaware of these plans of the Manchu government, Muhammad Yakubbek took advantage of the situation and sent ambassadors to the Manchu government without capturing the Borkul and Kumul regions, and repeatedly ordered his military units in the eastern regions such as Turpan and Urumqi to communicate with China, establish economic relations, and

resolve the problems between them by negotiation, and did not move against the Manchu army. These actions of Muhammad Yakubbek were extremely useful for the Manchu dynasty, which was trying to gain time. The Manchus tried to take full advantage of this [14]. The Manchu government, on the one hand, sent an ambassador to Muhammad Yakubbek, indicating its intention to negotiate with him, and on the other hand, it called on some leaders of the Tungan rebels in the Urumqi region to oppose Muhammad Yakubbek. This directly affected the aggravation of the internal situation in the Seven Cities State. Muhammad Yakubbek, in turn, was forced to suppress the Tungan movement against him and spend excessive resources on this in order to ensure the unity of East Turkestan.

At the end of 1873, the army of Zuo Zungdong completely suppressed the uprisings in the western regions of China and opened the way to East Turkestan. Then this army was divided into small groups and gradually began to advance to the eastern regions of this country, such as Barkul and Kumul, because it is impossible to transport more than 5-6 hundred military units at a time through the desert roads leading from western China to these regions. This was written about by Russian scientists, foreign travelers and those who saw this region with their own eyes. The author of these lines also saw these roads with his own eyes and witnessed that these Russian scientists and travelers wrote correctly. This movement of the Manchus certainly greatly worried Muhammad Yakubbek. The book "The Seven-City State" by Davut Isiev, a scholar currently residing in Almaty, Kazakhstan, shows that at this time, Muhammad Yakubbek repeatedly sent ambassadors led by Shodi Mirzo to St. Petersburg via Tashkent, seeking support from the Russian government, recognition of the Seven-City State, and mediation in establishing peaceful relations between it and China. However, these ambassadors were unable to fulfill their duties. According to Russian archival data, at that time there were three different opinions in Russia on the issue of East Turkestan. The supporters of the first opinion emphasized the need to support the Seven-City State and turn East Turkestan into a buffer zone, while at the same time securing the borders of the Central Asian region that had fallen under Russian influence. The supporters of the second opinion, mainly manufacturers and large capitalists, argued that if we supported the Seven Cities State in order to benefit from East Turkestan, we would be deprived of the huge profits from China [15]. The supporters of the third opinion believed that if an independent Islamic state like the Seven Cities State was preserved in East Turkestan, it would be difficult to preserve the Central Asian lands that had just passed into Russian hands. After serious negotiations and arguments, the supporters of the second and third opinions won. As a result, the Russian government preferred to remain neutral in the issue of supporting Muhammad Yakubbek. Later, some Russian merchants, who were interested in their own interests, bought grain from places such as the Ili Valley, Kazakhstan, and Siberia and sold it to Zuo Zungdong at a great profit, helping his army solve the problem of food and drink. The orders of the Russian government to prohibit these actions remained on paper.

Needing the help of large foreign powers, Muhammad Yakubbek also appealed to the governments of Turkey and England for help. Although Turkey was not a major power like England, Russia and China, it immediately recognized the Seven Cities State and extended a helping hand to it. Muhammad Yakubbek was pleased to be called the wealthy Ataliq Gazi. The British government also helped Muhammad Yakubbek in creating and equipping a modern army. By 1875, his army had reached 40,000 men, most of whom were equipped with modern weapons. Of course, Muhammad Yakubbek's forced labor, which required a large amount of money, became a heavy burden on the local people and increased their discontent. After all, in a country that had lived under the oppression of the Manchus for more than a century, had a one-sided economy, and was deprived of the right to manufacture weapons, there was no other way to create a modern army and have the opportunity to defend itself. Of course, this help was not in vain. The English capitalists benefited greatly from this. At the same time, they also showed great respect for Zuo Zungtong. The Manchu government, in turn, helped him out of his difficult situation by providing large loans several times to arm and supply the more than 50,000-strong army sent to East Turkestan.

In 1875, the Manchu government gathered a large force in the eastern and northern regions of East Turkestan and began a war against the Seven Cities State. No matter how hard Muhammad Yakubbek tried to conclude an agreement with the Manchu Empire and make it recognize his government, he could not stop this war. After the Manchus captured places such as Turpan and Urumqi, the internal situation of the Seven Cities State worsened. Therefore, in the difficult situation that arose, Muhammad Yakubbek again appealed to the British government and asked it to intervene to save the Seven Cities State. In such a situation, when Turkestan fell under the influence of Russia, the British government, which favored supporting the re-established national state in East Turkestan and subsequently bringing it under its influence, immediately began to fulfill Muhammad Yakubbek's request. Through his ambassador in Beijing, he proposed to the Manchu government to resolve the fate of the Seven Cities State peacefully and to stop the war. At the same time, he expressed Muhammad Yakubbek's firm determination to resolve future relations with the Manchu government through diplomatic means, and if there was no other option, he was also ready to preserve the Seven Cities State as a state under the influence of the Manchu Empire.

Muhammad Yakubbek's appeal through the British government intensified the long-standing disputes in the Manchu court. The essence of these disputes was that at that time, a major Chinese official, Li Hongzhong, who was responsible for the defense of the northern seas, caused excessive expenses for China during a period of economic crisis by a large force in East Turkestan. Therefore, he was trying to prove the idea that it was necessary to resolve the fate of this country peacefully without great expenses, and if necessary, to consider preserving it as a vassal state of the Manchu Empire. Another senior Chinese official, Zuo Zongtong, who was responsible for the reconquest of East Turkestan, had drawn the attention of the courtiers to the idea that it was necessary to use force to retake this territory, at great expense. To prove his point, Li Hongzhong

argued that in a situation where large foreign powers were attacking China by sea and threatening its independence, the first priority for China was to modernize the navy and strengthen its maritime defenses, and that it was possible to recognize the Seven Cities as a khanate subordinate to China and negotiate with its leader. He said that this issue would not require excessive costs. Zuo Zongtong, however, came forward with the opposite view. Zuo Zongtong, in order to prove his point, argued that the Manchu courtiers were representatives of distant states who came from the sea, and that we could retreat to them and temporarily give them some of our lands. One day there may be a fire in their homeland, and then they will definitely leave our lands. East Turkestan borders on Turkestan under Russian influence and India, which has become dependent on England. If we cannot regain this country despite great costs and losses, its territory may be occupied by these two countries. In that case, we will forever lose a country of important strategic and economic importance, through which trade routes connecting China with the West have passed for centuries, or the East Turkestans may unite with the Central Asians and become a great power and pose a threat to the western regions of China, such as Gansu and Shaanxi. He claimed that this was the will of great statesmen who lived in the past. Muhammad Yakubbek's appeal, made through the English government, increased the number of supporters of Li Hunzhong's idea. As a result, the Manchu dynasty decided to stop the army it had sent against the Seven Cities State halfway and negotiate with the British ambassadors about its fate. After this decision, it was inevitable that the Manchu dynasty would stop the money it was giving to Zuo Zungtong to destroy the Seven Cities State. Of course, this could have undermined its political and economic role and position in China. The Chinese general Zuo Zungtong, who did not want this to happen, tried to sabotage the process of dialogue on the issue raised by Muhammad Yakubbek through the British government.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The analysis of the historical, political, and geographical evolution of the Seven-City State under the leadership of Muhammad Yakubbek reveals the extraordinary efforts made in consolidating the fragmented khanates of East Turkestan into a centralized political entity during a time of regional instability and external threats. Muhammad Yakubbek's strategic military campaigns, combined with diplomatic efforts and administrative reforms, demonstrate his vision for establishing a viable state amidst the power dynamics involving Russia, the Manchu dynasty, and British interests. **Implication :** Despite geopolitical constraints, his leadership managed to introduce a provincial governance system, reinforce internal stability, and modernize the military with foreign assistance, particularly from England and Turkey. The Seven-City State's eventual decline highlights the difficulty of maintaining sovereignty in the face of imperial ambitions and regional rivalries. Nonetheless, Muhammad Yakubbek's attempt to seek peaceful solutions through negotiations with China and foreign mediation, while preparing for military defense, underscores his pragmatic approach to statecraft. **Limitation :** However, the study is limited by its focus on a specific historical

period and region, which may not allow for broad generalization to other political entities or leadership strategies. Additionally, the available sources primarily focus on external narratives, which may have led to certain internal aspects being underrepresented. **Future Research** : The legacy of the Seven-City State is not solely in its political unification of East Turkestan but also in its symbolic resistance against domination, its intricate governance mechanisms, and its attempt at establishing an independent Islamic state amid colonial-era competition. The lessons drawn from this historical experience remain relevant for understanding the interplay between leadership, geopolitical strategy, and the preservation of national identity in contested regions. Future research could explore deeper into the internal political dynamics, the role of local populations, and the long-term effects of the state's decline on regional identity and governance.

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