

November 14, 1950

Letter, Isa Yusuf Alptekin to Owen Lattimore

Citation:

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<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/134652>

Summary:

Isa Yusuf Alptekin recounts his experiences in Xinjiang in the 1940s and his flight to India and beyond after the Chinese Communist revolution. He also asks Lattimore for assistance in having exiled students from Xinjiang go to the United States for further education.

Original Language:

English

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 Isa Yusuf Aliphtakin,
 Ex Secretary General,
 Government of Turkistan,
 at present C/O Post Box No. 53,
 Srinagar Kashmir-India.
 Dated Srinagar, the 14th Nov. '50

My dear Mr. Owen Lattimore,

I hope you must be remembering the day of 1941 when I first met you in Chunking, China with Mr. Masud Sabri, Ex Governor, Turkistan. It was really happy occasion for me to meet you there. I am the same man Isa Yusuf Aliphtakin, who has now come over to Srinagar Kashmir as refugee - with so many of my countrymen. You would I hope, wish to know the circumstances which compelled me to come over to this place as refuge and leave my country.

In 1944, as you know, when the people of Ili rose against the then Government of Turkistan, I, Mr. Masud Sabri and Mr. Mohd Emin Bhogra were in China. We were however called by the Central Government of China back to Turkistan. In 1947 the Nationalist party was asked to form the ~~form~~ Government and Mr. Masud Sabri was made Governor, Mr. Mohd Emin Bhogra as Deputy Governor and myself as Secretary General. This is all well known to you, I hope.

In 1948 when Chinese Communists after capturing Peking were advancing towards Nanking, General Chiang Chih Chung who was at that time the Commander-in-Chief of the Head Quarters for Military and Political Affairs got our Government replaced and gave the Government in the hands of pro Russian communists. He accordingly got one Burhan Shahedi, as you know, ~~got~~ appointed as Governor of Turkistan and one of his own men as Secretary General. The policy of the Nationalist Government had always been to secure complete freedom for the people of Turkistan. Because of the pro Russian rule in Turkistan we had to face many difficulties and hardships. The Nationalist party wanted to secure full National autonomy for the people of Turkistan from the Chinese Government. The Chinese Government instead subjected us to this pro Russian supermacy and miseries. We always remained against it and tried to free our country from this autocratic pro Russian rule. We never wanted that Russian so rule our country again as was done in the days of Shin Shi Sy, the hardships of whose rule were still fresh in our minds. Mr. Lue Meng Cheng who was secretary General of the Head Quarters for Military and Political Affairs joined hands unofficially with the Chinese Communists in 1949. General Tao Shih Yao, Commander-in-Chief of the Nationalist army in Turkistan also joined hands with him and became party to his activities. Governor Burhan also joined them. These three men got replaced all non-communist members of the Government Machinery and decided to lay their arms before the communists unofficially. We came to know of this decision. This surrender meant in fact the Russian Control over our land again, the consequences of which were still fresh in our minds. We had no sufficient force or strength by which we could have defended our country from this communist invasion and save it. We therefore decided to leave our country with the hope that with the help of other peace loving countries of the world who love peace and democracy, we would be able to save our country from this communist grip. So we left on 20th September 1949 with other countrymen. ^{On hearing} of our escape a strong sensation spread among the other people of our country who feared the return of Shin Shi Sy's rule once again in Turkistan. They therefore decided to escape with us.

We along with hundreds of our countrymen reached the border. By this time the C-in-C- of the North Western Command and the Governor of Turkistan had surrendered to the Communists and in the beginning of October 1949 the Communist Army occupied Turkistan as you must have already heard. The new Government and the Occupational force sent telegrams to the border for arrest of myself and Mr. Mohd Emin Bhogra. We were accordingly arrested and I was tied with ropes. As we were taken back under military custody, we managed to escape from their grip and made our way towards Ladakh. After crossing mountains, impassable ways and rivers and facing unbearable hardships in the way, reached Ladakh on 12th of December 1949. After reaching Ladakh we came to know

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that some 789 of our countrymen had also reached Ladakh as refugees after crossing mountainous paths and after surrendering arms, ammunition, valuables and extra clothing to the ruthless Chinese soldiers at the border. As the refugees plodded through the treacherous snow and ice in a desperate race against time when their food would be gone and their animals dead, they were forced to abandon their relatives, friends and even wives who could go no farther. Under this forced march in altitudes up to 18000 feet where the thin air made the blood gush from the nostrils of men and animals alike, the animals began to die off rapidly. Finally large number of persons were afoot and often found the going impossible in 6 feet deep snow and glossy ice. Many had no tents and lay exposed. Mothers nursing children found their bones frozen as they tried to shelter their infants in enfolded arms, arms which had soon frozen hands. In this terrible journey besides the many people who were left in the way 54 persons and about 470 horses and pack horses died. 49 persons got their hands and feet frozen and thus got crippled. Property worth about one million rupees was either lost or left in the way.

On reaching Ladakh, we had to stay there for some time as both the routes, air and land were blocked due to snow & bad weather. During this stay the prices of commodities went up and about 220 persons had to return to their country owing to financial weakness and other reasons. 568 persons came over to Srinagar. Out of these about 400 persons proceeded to Mecca and some more than 100 are now left in Srinagar.

Regarding the facilities which were afforded by the Indian and Kashmir Governments, I may say that the Indian Govt. allowed these refugees who were mostly without passports to enter Indian territory and that too without any search. Sick injured and old people were afforded medical aid and the ailing were admitted into the Government Hospitals at Leh and Srinagar. A small dispensary was also opened at Serai Safa Kadal, Srinagar for the treatment of sick and ailing. Serai Safa Kadal is the present abode of these refugees in Srinagar. More than 300 of these refugees including men, women and children were evacuated by air from Ladakh to Srinagar without any charges. The Kashmir Govt. issued rations to these refugees at very moderate rates. In short all possible help was afforded to these refugees by the Indian and Kashmir Governments in so much as the Hon'ble Sheikh Mohd Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir was pleased to visit these refugees personally and was kind enough in donating a sum of rupees 5000/- for their aid.

As you are freedom and peace loving man of a peace loving country and fully in know of Asian affairs, and so I thought it proper to apprise you of the above ~~details~~ details and thought that this would be of some use to you.

On reaching Srinagar, I called on His Excellency the Ambassador of U.S.A in India and requested him for some financial help for these destitutes and also requested His Excellency for acceptance of some of refugee students for free educational training in America. His Excellency was pleased to promise all possible help, but so far no such help was received by us. America is helping most of the countries of the world and we hope that she will have the same helping hand on us and save us from the present misfortune. When we left our country we thought that America would help us but on coming to this place we have been much disheartened. Two persons had come from the Embassy for the interview of these refugee students and left after taking necessary details. Since then we have not heard anything from them or the Embassy. Our helpless students are patiently waiting for the same. I therefore request you to kindly recommend our pitiable case to your Government and get our students accepted by them.

Moreover I have heard that you have published a book introducing Turkistan to the world. I would request you to kindly send me 2 copies of this publication, if possible.

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I would also request you to kindly intimate me if Mr. Dilava Foyeh is putting up with you there. If so kindly convey my respects to him requesti-ng him to write to me sometimes. You may also kindly write to me and be in correspondence with me if possible.

With best wishes and hopes.

Yours Sincerely,
عبد الوہاب آصف خان