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# Emigrants/Muhacir from Xinjiang to Middle East during 1940-60s

Edited by
Jin NODA and Ryosuke ONO



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**Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA)**
**Tokyo University of Foreign Studies**

**Fuchu, Tokyo**

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Chapter 2

# Uyghur Immigrations from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey between 1949 and 1954

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**Istanbul University**

**Abstract**

This study addresses one of the most dramatic migration incidents that occurred after 1949. After the communist Chinese regime invaded Eastern Turkestan in 1949, prominent Eastern Turkestan leaders decided at various meetings to quit their homeland to talk about their cause in the free world and to get their voices heard. Many people lost their lives, froze to death, or had to return because of the difficult immigration conditions they encountered during the course of their journey. Those who were able to escape to India feverishly worked to enter Turkey. Although tens of thousands of people departed Eastern Turkestan, only 1,850 immigrants could overcome difficulties and were granted residence permits by Turkey. Those who were able to enter Turkey were placed in Istanbul, and subsequently in Manisa, Kayseri, and Niğde.

**Key Words**: Uyghur, migration, refugee, Eastern Turkestan, Turkey.

**Özet**

Bu çalışma ile; 1949 sonrası yaşanan tarihin en dramatik göç hadiseleri ele alınmıştır. 1949 yılında Doğu Türkistan'da Komünist Çin istilasının gerçekleşmesi üzerine, Doğu Türkistanlı ileri gelen liderler yaptıkları birkaç toplantıdan sonra davalarını hür dünyada anlatmak ve seslerini duyurabilmek için vatanlarından hicret etmeye karar vermişlerdi. Tarihin en dramatik göç hadisesi olarak

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nitelendirilebilecek bu yolculuk sırasında birçok insan hayatını kaybetmiş, birçok insan donarak ölmüş, birçoğu zorlu göç şartlarına dayanamayarak geri dönmek zorunda kalmıştır. Hindistan'a ulaşabilenler ise Türkiye'ye gidebilmek için hummalı bir çalışma içerisine girmiştir. 10 binlerce kişi ile başlanan göç hadisesi Türkiye'ye 1,850 Doğu Türkistanlı'nın iskânlı göçmen olarak kabul edilmesiyle son bulmuştur. Türkiye'ye gelebilenler ise başta İstanbul olmak üzere, Manisa, Kayseri ve Niğde illerine yerleştirilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler**: Uygur, göç, mülteci, Doğu Türkistan, Türkiye

## 1. Introduction

Attacks by the Kyrgyz around the mid 800's forced the Uyghurs to leave their homeland in large numbers and to migrate to major trade centers of Asia. They established two states named Eastern Turkestan (Turfan) Uyghur State and Gansu (Yellow Uyghur) Uyghur State in the places where they migrated. Thirteen Uyghur tribes initially scattered to the west of the Yellow River and then to the border of China after being defeated by the Kyrgyz. The Uyghurs, who could not remain in that area because of Chinese and Kyrgyz repression, established the longest-lasting state of Eastern Turkestan around Turfan and Beshbalik.[1] Led by rulers titled *Idikut*, Eastern Turkestan Uyghur State was established on the Silk Road route, a location that enabled the economic progress of the Uyghurs and also assisted in the community's development in agriculture, art, trade, state administration, and literature. However, the Eastern Turkestan Uyghur State was demolished in 1209 by the Mongols, which was then broken into various branches.[2] The Uyghurs have since established various nationhoods: the Saidiye National State (Yarkand Khanate) was instituted in 1514; the Kashgar State was established in 1863 by Sadık Beg, and with Yaqub Beg's leadership it became a united regional state; and independent Eastern Turkestan states came into being in 1933 and 1944. Uyghurs living in various countries have been obliged to live through numerous immigration incidents in this long period as other Turkish tribes.[3]

[1] Özkan İzgi, "Kao-Chang (Turfan) Uygurları," *Tarihte Türk Devletleri* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi Rektörlüğü Yayınları, 1987), 1: 235.

[2] Mehmet Emin Buğra, *Şarkî Türkistan Tarihi* (Ankara: Ofset Matbaacılık, 1987), 238 vd.

[3] Ömer Kul, "Osman Batur ve Doğu Türkistan Millî Mücadelesi (1911–1955)" (doktora tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi, 2009), 23.

## 2. Great Migration from Eastern Turkestan in 1949

Burhan Shahidi, the President of the government of Eastern Turkestan, surrendered when the Chinese People's Liberation Army invaded Eastern Turkestan in October 1949 and the nationhood's leaders were forced to disperse to various corners of the world. The country was once again exposed to Chinese occupation[4] and Eastern Turkestan encountered many difficulties in this period, which marked a return to the circumstances faced for centuries: migration, exile, and struggle.[5]

At various meetings organized to evaluate the political climate, Muslim-Turkish leaders living in Eastern Turkestan decided collectively in September 1949 to move to foreign countries. Mehmet Emin Buğra, Canımhan Hacı, İsa Yusuf Alptekin, Nurgocay Batur, and Adil Bey, a deputy of Osman Batur, attended the meeting.[6] Two opinions were put forward with regard to the proposed migration. Buğra and Alptekin pointed out that motorized vehicles could be used up to the borderline to India or Pakistan. After crossing the borders, the journey would have to continue on horses so that the movement would be faster on the difficult mountain terrain. According to the opinions of this group, the elderly and the children would not be able to endure the hardships of a passage accomplished entirely on horses, and that more casualties were certain if the mountain route was chosen. The group headed by Canımhan Hacı defended the idea of migration on horses and argued that if the motorized vehicles were employed on the plains, the communists would be better placed to catch up with the migrants.[7] The discussions on the migration route did not take long and soon, the Muslim-Turkish leaders of Eastern Turkestan reached a consensus on taking two different routes: the mountains, and the plains. Accordingly, they began to prepare for migration in the shortest time possible.[8]

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4 Gülçin Çandaroğlu, *Özgürlük Yolu: Nurgocay Batur'un Anılarıyla Osman Batur* (İstanbul: Doğu Kütüphanesi, 2006), 14; Baymirza Hayit, *Türkistan Devletlerinin Millî Mücadeleleri Tarihi*, 2. bs. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2004), 329; Hızırbek Gayretullah, "Osman Batur ve Millî Mücadelesi," *Altay Kartalı Osman Batur*, haz., Hızırbek Gayretullah, Ahmet Türköz ve M. Ali Engin (İstanbul: Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği, 2003), 43.

5 Kul, "Osman Batur," 342.

6 Altan Deliorman, Abdülkadir Donuk ve İsa Kocakaplan, haz., *Türklük Mücahidi İsa Yusuf* (İstanbul: Bayrak Basımevi, 1991), 52; Erkin Alptekin, *Doğu Türkistan'dan Hicretimizin 40. Yılı* (Kayseri: Erciyes Dergisi Doğu Türkistan Yayınları, 1992), 6; Kul, "Osman Batur," 361.

7 Tekin Tuncer, "1949–1964 Yılları Arasında Doğu Türkistan'da İstiklal Mücadelesi ve Türkiye'ye Yapılan Göçler" (doktora tezi, Celal Bayar Üniversitesi, 2015), 224.

8 Dälelkhan Zhanaltay, *Qilï Zaman – Qïïn Künder* (Almaty: Düniezhüzï Qazaqtarïnïng Qauïmdastïghï, 2000), 85 vd.; Çandaroğlu, *Özgürlük Yolu*, 141; Alptekin, *Doğu Türkistan'dan*, 6.

It is understood from this information that the Muslim-Turkish leaders of Eastern Turkestan commanded no force to fight against Tao Zhiyue and his supporters, the nationalist Chinese, the Soviet Union, and the Red Chinese communists. Hence, they decided to migrate and to struggle in foreign countries by means of alliances. After the decision to migrate was taken, Mehmet Emin Buğra left Urumqi on September 17, 1949 and İsa Yusuf Alptekin followed three days later.[9]

As the immigration movement occurred, the People's Republic of China was proclaimed on October 1, 1949, and the Red Chinese troops completed its invasion of Eastern Turkestan on October 13, 1949.[10]

As already mentioned, the immigration determination had already been taken and it was decided that the cause of Turkestan would be continued in the free world when the Communist occupation began in Eastern Turkestan in 1949. Two routes were set for the movement. The group led by Buğra and Alptekin made their way through the plains, and the followers led by Osman Batur, Canımhan Hacı, and Alibek Rahimbek Hâkim used mountain roads.[11] An essential period of exile began for the salvation of people. Buğra and Alptekin's troop achieved the aim of leaving their country after grueling experiences, but the migration of Osman Batur and his followers faced even more difficult events and armed conflicts. Although the right-wing opposition to Chinese communists was controlled by the capture of Osman Batur and the immigration of Mehmet Emin Buğra, İsa Yusuf Alptekin, Delilhan Canaltay, Yolbars Beg, Alibek Hâkim and Hüseyin Teyci, rebellions against the Chinese continued in the country.[12] Unlike the previous uprising against communism, these revolts were characteristically against Chinese administration.[13]

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[9] Ömer Kul, haz., *Esir Doğu Türkistan İçin: İsa Yusuf Alptekin'in Mücadele Hatıraları* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2010), 1: 539 vd.; Tuncer, "1949–1964 Yılları Arasında," 225.

[10] Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti, *Türkistan Şehitleri* (İstanbul: Tan Matbaası, 1969), 44. Başaran claims that Communists began to poison the water resources to capture the Turks; however, information about this is not available in other sources. Mustafa Başaran, "Doğu Türkistan İstiklâl Kahramanı Osman Batur İslamoğlu (1899–1951)," (bitirme tezi, İstanbul Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Umumi Türk Tarihi Kürsüsü, 1972), 22.

[11] Tuncer, "1949–1964 Yılları Arasında," 225.

[12] Çandaroğlu, *Özgürlük Yolu*, 203.

[13] George Moseley, *A Sino-Soviet Cultural Frontier: The Ili Kazakh Autonomous Chou* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 15; *Moslem Unrest in China* (Kowloon [Hong Kong]: Union Press, 1958), 51–52; Oleh S. Fedyshyn, "Soviet Retreat in Sinkiang?: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and Cooperation, 1950–1955," *American Slavonic and East European Review* 16, no. 2 (1957): 127–45.

After departing from Urumqi, Mehmet Emin Buğra, and İsa Yusuf Alptekin arrived at Ladak via Kashgar, Kök-Art, Körlen, and Sanju road. They faced many difficulties on the way: Buğra and Alptekin were arrested by the border police station and were hung with bound hands and feet for the whole night. Buğra and Alptekin had planned to leave Eastern Turkestan with official permission, but despite all their efforts, their passports were deemed invalid and they were subjected to great pressure to return. Many died on the road in the course of the migration; numerous people contracted frost-bite and gangrene; several could not stand the difficult conditions of the journey and returned. Alptekin's eldest daughter Yalkın, had gangrene from the cold, and although she was operated and her left foot was amputated after to the group's arrival in India, she could not be saved.[14]

In 1949, after the communist Chinese troops reached Gansu and the Chinese General Tao surrendered to the communist Chinese without even shooting a single bullet, the balance of power in Eastern Turkestan underwent a sea change. Eastern Turkestanies held several meetings to discuss what action to take under these circumstances. They ultimately decided collectively to migrate from the country. Hence, Eastern Turkestanies began the process of seeking asylum in India under the leadership of prominent Eastern Turkestan leaders. Osman Batur, Canımhan Hacı, Nurgocay Batur, and Delilhan Canaltay formed one group, and Alibek Hâkim assembled another unit. The migration movement started after this immigration decision was taken in 1949. The goal of these groups was to reach the Gasköl region in northwest Qinghai and to mobilize by joining Hüseyin Teyci who had settled in the region in the course of the 1937–1938 migration movement.[15] Yet another branch of migration was the faction headed by İsa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Buğra.[16] Troops that completed their preparations began the journey to India as their first destination.

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[14] For more information on these issues, see Ömer Kul, haz., *Esir Doğu Türkistan İçin: İsa Yusuf Alptekin'in Mücadele Hatıraları* (Ankara: Berikan yayınevi, 2010), 1: 550 vs.

[15] Hasan Oraltay, *Hürriyet Uğrunda Doğu Türkistan Kazak Türkleri*, 2. bs. (İstanbul: Türk Kültür Yayını, 1975), 202; Godfrey Lias, *Kazak Türklerinin Destanı* (İstanbul: Kuşak Ofset, 1992), 90; Orhan Türkdoğan, "Bir Kazak Halk Kahramanı: Ali Beg Hâkim," *Türk Dünyası Tarih Dergisi*, sy. 133 (1998): 9; Godfrey Lias, *Göç*, çev., Mehmet Çağrı (İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları, 1973), 207.

[16] Kul, *Esir Doğu*, 1: 554; Mehmet Emin Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan: Tarihi, Coğrafi ve Şimdiki Durumu* (İstanbul: Güven Basımevi, 1952), 68; Abdullah Bakır, *Doğu Türkistan İstiklâl Hareketi ve Mehmet Emin Buğra* (İstanbul: Özrenk Matbaası, 2005), 92; Lias, *Göç*, 210; Hacı Yakup Anat, *Hayatım ve Mücadelem*, haz., Soner Yalçın (Ankara: Özkan Matbaacılık, 2003), 89; Hızırbek Gayretullah, *Uzaklara Balam* (İstanbul: Toker Yayınları, 2009), 105.

The routes taken by the migrants were filled with distressing encounters that challenged both the human body and mind. Superhuman effort was required to overcome the Himalayas, the world's tallest and longest mountain range, with the baggage, mounts, children as well as elderly people. The roads comprised mostly of high mountains, deep cliffs, and intermittent valleys. Sometimes, the temperatures were inhuman and decreased to −45 degrees. Many people died by reasons such as stenocardia, shortness of breath, etc. when passing the high terrains of the Himalayas. Since there was no food or drink available on the way, animals nibbled rope, canvas, rugs, and comforters.

Even though it was so difficult, many of the groups arrived in India.[17] The greatest help in reaching India was made by Kazakh brethren who had previously settled in India. The Indian Government, the Indian Red Cross Society, the Kashmir Government, and the World Council of Churches also provided food and accommodation to immigrants arriving in Kashmir.[18] For example, the expenses of 400 immigrants who arrived in 1949 were covered by the Kashmir Government from the border of India to Srinagar, by the Indian Government from Kashmir to Bombay, and by the World Council of Churches from Bombay to the border of Turkey as the immigrants were finally intent on reaching Turkey.[19]

The Indian state liberated itself from British colonial rule and proclaimed its independence in 1947. Subsequently, the country was divided into India and Pakistan.[20] The Turks in India moved to the Pakistan side because they were Muslims and a Hindu-Muslim conflict followed the partition. The Eastern Turkestan migrants arrived in India in 1949 and met with Kazakh groups. İsa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Buğra, who were arriving through Kashmir, received a message from the other leaders that they should apply for permission to go to Turkey because others before them had done so.

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[17] Orhan Türkdoğan, *Salihli'de Türkistan Göçmenlerinin Yerleşmeleri* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Basımevi, 1969), 32; Lias, *Göç*, 317; Buğra, *Doğu Türkistan*, 98; Hızır Bek Gayretullah, *Altaylarda Kanlı Günler* (İstanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası, 1977), 218; Kul, *Esir Doğu*, 1: 598-599; Gayretullah, *Uzaklara Balam*, 134.

[18] A. Kayyum Kesici, "Doğu Türkistanlı Kazak Türklerinin Türkiye'ye Göçünün 50. Yılı Münasebetiyle-II," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Tarih Dergisi*, sy. 195 (2003): 21; "Doğu Türkistan'dan Kanlı Göçler," *Türk Dünyası*, sy. 7 (1967): 7.

[19] "Doğu Türkistan'dan," 8.

[20] Halife Altay, *Anayurttan Anadolu'ya*, 2. bs. (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1998), 406.

The former Chief Deputy Governor Mehmet Emin Buğra and the former General Secretary of Eastern Turkestan İsa Yusuf Alptekin escaped persecution by the communists by traveling to Kashmir and finally entered Turkey. They discussed the possibility of residence permits for the 1,850 Eastern Turkestan immigrants, who had found asylum in India and Pakistan, with the authorities of the Republic of Turkey. These migrants expected to enter Turkey on January 7, 1952.[21] The Eastern Turkestan committee visited Refik Koraltan, the Speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey; Fuat Köprülü, the Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Minister of Finance, Hasan Polatkan; the Minister of Interior, Fevzi Lütfi Karaosmanoğlu; the Minister of National Education, Tevfik İleri; and Haşim İşcan, the Director-General for Land and Settlement Affairs to inform them about the committee's intentions. The leaders of Eastern Turkestan also sent their requests in writing to the authorities on the recommendation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. As a result of Fuat Köprülü's efforts, Eastern Turkestan refugees living in India and Pakistan were accepted and granted residence permits to Turkey by means of enactment of No. 3/14595, dated March 13, 1952, and necessary allowances were allocated for them.[22]

Many news reports were published in Turkish periodicals about the incoming immigrants from Kashmir. For example, the newspaper *Milliyet* reported that 103 immigrants who followed Hüseyin Teyci would soon arrive in Turkey. The same newspaper published that these 103 people set off under Hüseyin Teyci's leadership on October 28, 1952. The first immigrant group was placed in a house prepared for refugees on November 12.[23] A flood of other groups similarly continued to arrive and resettle. Eastern Turkestan immigrants brought to Istanbul were temporarily placed in immigrant guesthouses in Zeytinburnu, Sirkeci, and Tuzla. The dispatch of immigrants to the determined settlement areas was resolved and accomplished gradually between 1953 and 1958. In this period, the Directorate-General for Land and Settlement Affairs covered the expenses for the immigrants' needs. Later, Eastern Turke-

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[21] *Son Telgraf*, 7 Ocak 1952; Ömer Kul, haz., *Esir Doğu Türkistan İçin: İsa Yusuf Alptekin'in Mücadele Hatıraları* (Ankara: Berikan Yayınevi, 2007), 2: 57; Bakır, *Doğu Türkistan İstiklâl Hareketi*, 104.

[22] Kul, *Esir Doğu*, 2: 75; Zafer Selvi, Mansur Teyci ve Abdulvahap Kara, *Kazakların Doğu Türkistan'dan Anadolu'ya Göçü ve Osman Taştan* (İstanbul: Kazak Türkleri Vakfı, 1996), 55; Altay, *Anayurttan*, 420; Ahmet Fethi Ahmet Yüksel, "Peşaver Doğu Türkistanlı Kazak Muhacirler Derneği ve Yahya Kemal Beyatlı," *Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Tarih Dergisi*, sy. 296 (2011): 23; Bakır, *Doğu Türkistan İstiklâl Hareketi*, 202.

[23] Altay, *Anayurttan*, 426; *Milliyet*, 2 Ağustos 1952; 28 Ekim 1952; 29 Kasım 1952.

stan migrants living in guesthouses were placed in various settlements. To detail the rehabilitation:

1. 201 people belonging to 59 families were sent to the Sultanah sub-district of Aksaray district of the Niğde Province.
2. 146 families comprising 468 people were settled in Salihli district of the Manisa Province.
3. A group of 104 families consisting of 344 people were housed in Sindelhöyük and Karacaviran villages of Develi district of the Kayseri Province and in Kopçu and Kocahacılı villages of Yahyalı district.
4. 545 people belonging to 160 families were rehabilitated in Altay village of Ulukışla district in the Niğde Province which thereafter came to be known as the homeland of the Eastern Turkestan immigrants.
5. 60 families comprising 238 people were placed in İsmil village in Karatay district of the Konya Province.
6. 35 people belonging to 11 families were rehoused in Ereğli district in Konya.
7. 10 people belonging to 2 families were placed in down-town Adapazarı.[24]

The Turkish administration decided that residence permits would be provided to 1,850 immigrants and 542 families, totaling 1,841 people who finally arrived in Turkey over the course of the migration. As of 1967, this number increased to 3,075 with the birth of 1,243 babies since the arrival of the migrants to Turkey.

## 3. Conclusion

When the migration incidents generally discussed in this paper are contemplated with respect to humanitarian concerns and to the conscientious responsibility of international political relations, catastrophic memories of thousands of people may be evaluated compassionately. All details of the negative results of migration have not been included in this paper in order to remain firmly on the stated topic. Whether or not the migration from Eastern Turkestan to Turkey should be named one of the most dramatic events of history should be sociologically assessed.

Briefly, the first group of immigrants moved to Turkey with great difficulty and effort on October 20, 1952. Generally, the mass exit from Eastern Turkestan is evaluated from the aspect of patriotism, as people were forced to leave their home-

[24] Tuncer, "1949–1964 Yılları Arasında," 303–4.

land and were obliged to deal with the negative consequences of their migration to Turkey. Even if this exodus is regarded to be the result of individual decision-making, the exile of human beings has not seen its final chapter. If international organizations fail to tackle such issues, there will probably be new waves of migration in the near future. Perhaps this study will enable a new point of view for researchers investing Eastern Turkestan since the migrations of 1965 and 1967 were assessed as a combined whole. Finally, future research initiatives must take into consideration the reasons why people quit their homeland, leaving properties, relatives, friends, and full lives without knowing whether or not they would ever get the opportunity to return to the country of their birth. Thus, urgent steps must be taken to find solutions to such socio-political issues.

**ATTACHMENTS (Please refer to pages 141–150)**

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