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A Tatar Turkist in Chinese Turkistan: Nushirvan Yavshef's travels in Xinjiang, 1914–1917

David Brophy*

Among visitors to Xinjiang in the first half of the twentieth century, the name of Nushirvan Yavshef is not the best known, but his writings deserve attention for the unique perspective they offer on local society. Yavshef, a Tatar Muslim from Russia, wrote a series of dispatches from Xinjiang for the Russian Muslim press between 1915 and 1917, totalling over 150 articles. This body of work allows us to ask important questions about the relationship between the Muslims of Russia and of western China. This article seeks to place Yavshef's writing in the context of 'Jadidist' discourse on China and asks what difference the experience of travel made to his social reformist outlook on Xinjiang.

Keywords: Jadidism; journalism; ethnography; Turkism; Central Asia; Xinjiang

In 1913, the prominent Turkistani writer Sadr al-Din 'Ayni met a peripatetic Tatar schoolteacher who was then sojourning in Samarqand. 'Ayni encouraged the young man to continue his travels through Russian Turkistan eastwards, into Chinese Turkistan, or Xinjiang. He joked with him,

you've spent six months on this stay in Samarqand. If you stop in each city for six months, then you'll reach Chinese Turkistan ten years from now! With such sluggishness, I suspect your trip [around the world] will be confined to the world of Chinese Turkistan. (['Ayni] 1917)

Little did 'Ayni know that his jest would prove prophetic. Nushirvan Yavshef (1885–1917),¹ a pioneering figure in Russian Muslim journalism, spent three years in Chinese Turkistan, from 1914 to 1917. Enthused by the revolutions of 1917, he cut short his journey and returned to Tashkent, where he died in mysterious circumstances before the year was out. His travels were limited to Chinese Turkistan, and he never succeeded in his aim of collecting his writings into book form. His *oeuvre* is nevertheless impressive, consisting of over 150 articles spread across five pre-revolutionary newspapers and journals – a rich body of source material for the study of Muslim society in Xinjiang. Outside a small circle of scholars, though, he remains obscure, certainly in comparison with contemporary European travellers and explorers in western China.²

In what follows, I introduce Yavshef and his work, situating him in the context of Turkophone, primarily Russian Muslim, travel writing in the early twentieth century. I discuss Yavshef's motivations for his trip to Chinese Turkistan and the literary tropes that informed his presentation of the journey. As a Russian Muslim, Yavshef occupied a middle ground between insider and outsider status among the Muslims of Chinese Turkistan: close enough to sympathise with his fellow Turkic-speaking Muslims, but distant enough to romanticise the people and place

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too. While tapping into Russian orientalist discourse on China and Chinese Turkistan, Yavshef's work also sheds light on Chinese Turkistan's position within the Russian Muslim discourse of cultural reform known as Jadidism, as well as the increasingly militant Turkic nationalism that the First World War provoked.

Yavshef and his journey

Little is known of Nushirvan Yavshef's biography, and the post-Soviet revival of interest in pre-revolutionary intellectuals among Muslims in Russia seems to have largely passed him by. Piecing together the information contained in his writings, a handful of obituaries and in Riza al-Din Fakhr al-Din's entry on him in his biographical compendium *Āsār*, only a rough outline emerges (Fakhr al-Din 2010, 346–347). Born in 1885 in the village of Arslan in the Belebey district, in what is today part of Bashkortostan, Yavshef's family hailed from a line of hereditary aristocrats, but were not particularly well off.³ In 1907, a local mudarris (madrasa teacher) met a shabbily dressed Nushirvan who had just finished his primary (maktab) schooling at 21 years of age and was starting to show an interest in travelling (Sarbiĥof 1917). The mudarris encouraged him to continue his studies at the reformist Husayniyya madrasa in Orenburg, though he seems to have headed instead to Ufa. He evidently had something of wanderlust, and it is unclear how long he remained a student. A basic madrasa education equipped Yavshef with a passport to travel, at least within the Russian empire, as a roving schoolteacher. At some point he left for the steppe, where he spent several years teaching among the Kazakhs.

In 1913, Yavshef headed further south into Turkistan, first to Tashkent, and then to Bukhara, Kerki and spent the winter of 1914 in Samarqand. A wealthy local found him sleeping rough on the streets and accommodated him ([ʿAynī] 1917). As it happened, Sadr al-Din ʿAynī was also spending that winter in Samarqand and was a frequent visitor to Yavshef's host. It was there that the two men became acquainted. Yavshef may have also met the Samarqandi intellectual Mahmud Khoja Behbudi, since it was in Behbudi's newspaper *The Mirror* (*Āyina*) that he published some of his first articles recounting his trip. From Samarqand, Yavshef first headed east into the Fergana Valley, turned north to Tashkent and Semirech'e, and then travelled along the Ili River and entered Chinese territory. The towns of Suiding and Ghulja were his first ports of call in Xinjiang. From there, he followed the Chinese highway east to the provincial capital of Ürümchi, then south to Turfan and around the rim of the Tarim Basin. Judging from his articles, Yavshef arrived in Kashgar sometime in the middle of 1915. Later in the year he continued his journey to the southeast via Yarkand and Khotan, going as far as the oasis of Keriya by the spring of 1916 before retracing his steps to Kashgar.

Yavshef's output during his travels was nothing short of prolific, totalling approximately 160 articles spread across five different newspapers and journals. Chief among these were the Tatar newspaper *Time* (*Waqt*) and its sibling journal *The Council* (*Shūrā*), both of them Orenburg publications. He also wrote for *The Sun* (*Quyash*), published in Kazan. He contributed to the Turkistani reformist press too, sending many of his early pieces to the two flagship publications of Turkistani Jadidism: Behbudi's *The Mirror* (published in Samarqand, 1913–1915) and Ubaydullah Khojaev's *Voice of Turkistan* (*Ṣadā-yi Turkistān*, published in Tashkent, 1914–1915). These two periodicals were both shut down in 1915 and from this point on the bulk of Yavshef's work is found in *Time* and *The Council*. Yavshef's productivity is particularly impressive given the difficulties of communication between Chinese Turkistan and the centres of Russian Muslim publishing, something that he commented on during his trip (Yavshef 1917a). Yavshef seems to have relied in part on the Russian postal system and in part on caravan-courier networks within the Russian Muslim diaspora. Sending copy to publishers in Turkistan or Russia was thus a fraught process, and his pieces did not always appear in the order in which they were written.

Modes of travel and models of travel writing

Travel, and writing about travel, has a very long history in the Muslim world, and claims to innovation must be carefully weighed against earlier forms of journeying and genres of travel writing. Travel for the purpose of migrating from non-Islamic rule, carrying out a pilgrimage to Mecca or seeking knowledge all find solid justification in Islamic tradition. In Xinjiang itself, the many Islamic shrines have produced a body of literature recounting visits by locals and by outsiders. Sufi hagiographies such as that of Majzub Namangani include stories of travel to Kashgar and Yarkand (Namangānī n.d.). Muhammad Zalili's eighteenth-century *Safarnāma* recounts a local's experience of a tour of the Tarim Basin (Tursun 1985).⁴ And in the 1880s, Qurban 'Ali Khalidi (1846–1913), imam of the community of Russian subjects in Tarbaghatay (Chöchäk), penned an account of a trip to the shrines of the Turfan region. Khalidi's *Tārīkh-i jarīda-i jadīda* (Khālīdī 1889) circulated widely in both manuscript and published form, and it is quite conceivable that Yavshef knew of the book. Though Yavshef was firmly opposed to the worship of Sufi saints, his itinerary followed these well-established routes, and took in many of the province's notable shrines, including that of the Seven Sleepers in Tuyuq, Satuq Bughra Khan in Artush and Afaq Khoja in Kashgar.

Herzog and Motika (2000) trace the origins of Yavshef's preferred genre – a serialised travelogue destined for publication in book form – to Ottoman writers such as Mehmed Emin, who undertook a trip to Turkistan in the 1870s. Such writing accompanied the growth of the periodical press and international postal services, providing the traveller with a forum for the narration of his travels-in-progress. Mehmed Emin's account of his trip appeared in the reformist daily *The Interpreter of Truth* (*Terjümān-i haqīqat*) in 1878–1879, and Ottoman intellectuals saw its publication as an important literary event. In his preface to the work, the editor Ahmed Midhat Efendi outlined his view of the significance of travel and travel writing. Travel, Midhat believed, was one of the habits that distinguished progressive European nations from those lagging behind in the Muslim world. As Midhat saw it, travel was more than simply a means to an end. It was not just that journeys of exploration had enabled the Europeans to access profitable resources and routes of commerce around the world. Rather, travel itself was a mark of civilisation, and of the intellectual curiosity that modern times demanded.

Europe was the inspiration for this new form of travelling, therefore, but was not always the destination. Of course, many Ottoman travellers did go to Europe and returned to report on the progress that they witnessed. A number of early twentieth-century Tatar and Turkistani travellers also sought new models of modernisation in the West. In his study of Turkistani Jadidists, Adeeb Khalid describes how Turkistani travellers 'painted a uniformly positive picture' of the European societies they encountered on such trips (Khalid 1998, 138). Yet it was equally obvious that the Europeans themselves did not seek out the world's most advanced countries on their journeys, but often its most remote and inaccessible parts – particularly in Asia and Africa. In the Russian case, the intrepid explorer typically undertook a long continental journey to the East, often to China. The effort to emulate such exploits led to what Herzog and Motika call 'Orientalism *alla turca*' (2000).

Given the link between print journalism and the new travel writing, it is not surprising that the eminent Crimean Tatar publicist Ismail Gasprinskii was among the first Russian Muslims to try his hand at it. Following in Mehmed Emin's footsteps, Gasprinskii travelled to Bukhara and Turkistan in 1893 and published his account in his flagship *The Interpreter* (*Terjümān*). For Tatar intellectuals in Russia, these paths to Samarqand and Bukhara were well trodden, and they enjoyed a complicated love-hate relationship with the intellectual centres of Turkistan – something Frank (2012) describes as the 'Bukhara paradox'. Gasprinskii adopted certain orientalist tropes in criticising the 'eastern or Chinese methods' that he saw in Muslim

society in Tashkent, but as a fellow citizen of the Russian empire he felt responsible for the fate of these Turkistani Muslims and used his articles as a vehicle for social criticism (Gaspıralı 2008, 404).

The early twentieth century saw more wide-ranging and politicised travel accounts, inspired in part by a growing Muslim interest in forging links with Asia. Süleyman Şükrü (1865–1922?), an Ottoman subject, was one such individual who explored the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, China and Russia, before publishing his *Great Journey* in Saint Petersburg in 1907 (Şükrü 2005). The precise purpose of his trip remains unclear, leading some to suggest that he was on a mission in Asia for the Caliph and Sultan Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1909). Şükrü's publisher in Saint Petersburg was none other than Abdürreshid İbrahim (1857–1944), a Siberian Muslim who was then taking a particular interest in the rise of Japan. Soon after seeing Şükrü's book into print, İbrahim left on a trip of his own through China to Japan and back, in the course of which he published a number of articles in the Turkish and Tatar press. İbrahim's first book-length account of the journey, *Tour of the World*, was printed in Kazan in 1909, and his better-known *The Islamic World, or The Spread of Islam in Japan* came out in 1911 (İbrahim 1909, 1911).⁵

The differing sensibilities towards travel that can be found in these works – as a proper pursuit for a modern man of the world, as an opportunity for social criticism, as a means for widening the Muslim world's horizons and for exploring the basis for pan-Asian solidarity – can all be found in Yavshef's writings. By his own account, İbrahim's *Tour of the World* was a particular inspiration for the journey to Chinese Turkistan ([ʿAynī] 1917), and his laments for the stagnation of the province's Muslim society echo Jadidist accounts of Bukhara. Yet, there is something else to be found in Yavshef's work, reflecting the position of Chinese Turkistan within emerging scholarly and political discourses of the period. These various aspects of his mode of travel are dealt with below.

Yavshef in Chinese Turkistan

As a Turkic-speaking Muslim, Yavshef in one sense remained within his own imagined community while in Xinjiang. Yavshef's notion of a Turkic nation embraced the local Muslims he encountered in Xinjiang, whom he refers to variously as the 'Turks of Altishahr', the 'Muslims of China' or the 'Muslims of Chinese Turkistan'. On the other hand, as a Muslim from Russia, Yavshef belonged to a privileged elite in Xinjiang society, who benefited from the provisions of Russia's treaties with the Qing (still in effect), and the network of Russian consuls and headmen who facilitated his journey through the province. Crossing the border into China, Yavshef must have held a passport of some description, and he mentions carrying letters issued by Russian consuls in Xinjiang, though he is silent on his contacts with the consuls themselves. He announces his arrival in one of his first dispatches from Chinese soil, a feuilleton on 'China and Civilization', which draws a stark contrast between the cultural level on the Russian and Chinese sides of the border (Yavshef 1915a). Yet from this point on, Yavshef's writings contain little mention of things Chinese or encounters with Chinese officials. Even the local Dungan Muslims remain an unknown quantity for him – as Chinese speakers, he finds it difficult to communicate with them and relies on second-hand reports from his travel companions for his descriptions of the Dungan community (Yavshef 1916a).

Yavshef's Xinjiang is therefore largely defined by the local Muslim community and the Russian subjects living among them. At a number of stops he describes drawing on the network of official headmen among the small communities of Tatars and Turkistanis doing business in Xinjiang, known as *aqsaqals*. These *aqsaqals* helped Yavshef find accommodation and were a source of information on local economic and social conditions. Mostly he depicts

these interactions as pleasant hospitality rituals, but by the end of his trip Yavshef had developed a critical view of the *aqsqaqs* – something he only felt confident to express following the fall of the tsar in February 1917. In an article in the following May calling for the Russian consul in Xinjiang to be elected by local Russian subjects, he complains:

It is as if the consul is the padshah, and the *aqsqaqs* are his viziers. The correspondence of our traders in foreign lands, and all the good and bad things said in that correspondence, is entirely in the hands of the consul and the *aqsqaqs* ... The *aqsqaqs*' treatment of the commoners consists of nothing but cruelty and tyranny. (Yavshef 1917c)

As suggested, Yavshef's trip to Xinjiang can be read as an extension of his trip to Russian Turkistan and stands in the tradition of using the travelogue genre as criticism of the Russian Muslim community. For Western and Chinese visitors, the trip to Xinjiang was first and foremost an arduous journey, through a strange, and often harsh, natural environment. The experience of the desert, or the icy mountain pass, the problem of handling an unwieldy train of camels or the discomforts of cart travel – these lie at the centre of such accounts. Not so for Yavshef. His is an engaged form of travel, where description serves as a prelude to criticism. He spends little time recounting his experience of the environment or the road, and his descriptive vocabulary is repetitive and stylised. The scenery is beautiful, he might comment, only to make the point that the soil must be productive, and that the people would be wealthy if they were not so backward. Likewise, the province's towering mountain ranges arouse his interest only insofar as they promise abundant natural resources that are yet to be tapped.

An article describing his trip from Kashgar to Khotan exemplifies Yavshef's style (1915g). Mishaps along the way allow him to decry the Chinese administration's neglect of the province:

On the third day of the [Ramadan] holiday, which was the 1st of August, I set out in the evening in a cart. We travelled by night, and in the morning, when the sun was about to rise, our cart reached the Khanariq River and halted. On the other side there were carts too. They were afraid to enter. Although the river wasn't so wide, it was deep and fast-flowing. There was a large caravan road, but no bridge had been built. With a 'bismillah', our cart drove into the water, and horse and cart began flowing downstream. The horse's foot got stuck in the mud, and it collapsed into the river. Water flooded into the cart. By this time there were a lot of people there, and they rescued us. The people are forced to cross [the river] on donkeys laden with goods, but despite this the Chinese government still doesn't erect a bridge here. (Yavshef 1915 g)

In the next village Yavshef meets a widow, who tells him tearfully how her son's gambling habit has squandered her late husband's legacy. Beaten by his creditors, her son is now crippled, forcing her to work to support him. Moving on from this grim scene, he arrives next in the town of Yengisar: 'the thing that most attracted my attention were the Muslim girls selling things in the Chinese pawnshops that lined either side of the road' (Yavshef 1915 g). Yavshef was not simply disturbed at the thought that these girls had married Chinese shopkeepers, but that they seemed to be the pick of the bunch: 'These girls were prettier than the rest. Perhaps the Chinese were choosing the most beautiful, like skimming cream off milk, leaving the Muslims with the lame and unattractive ones' (1915 g).

At midday on the next day, on his way from Yengisar to Qizil, he meets a party of peasants, who had been touring local shrines to pray for rain in their parched district. Failing in that approach, they have just paid a hefty fee for a rainmaker (*yadachi*) to work his magic. Yavshef notes with regret that there was plenty of water in nearby mountain lakes, but that locals lacked the engineering skills to access it. The next day he encounters a party of swarthy labourers returning to Khotan after a season of work across the border in the Russian-held Fergana Valley.

Yavshef's thoughts return to the previous day's scene: 'If these mighty men could be put to work there, then the mountain lakes could be brought to the fields' (1915 g).

For the most part, Yavshef's interactions with locals take the form of an inquiry in which he asks questions and obtains the information he needs. Only rarely does the author himself become the focus of attention in his narrative, and here too the intent is to convey the ignorance and isolation of the locals:

When I passed a place called Chingiz, a rider approached:

Local: Salam alaykum!

Yavshef: Wa alaykum salam!

L: Where are you going?

Y: To Kashgar.

L: Where are you coming from?

Y: From Kucha.

L: Do you live in Mecca and Medina?

Y: No, in Russia.

L: There's a rumour that Russia is at war, is that true? Who is it fighting with?

Y: Germany ...

L: Who is Russia subject to?

Y: It isn't subject to anyone, it has its own great king.

L: These Germans – are they infidels, or Muslims?

Y: I don't know.

L: They say that the Germans fly in the air, is that true?

Y: It's true.

L: God Almighty! And without wings! (Yavshef 1915d)

Derisive vignettes such as this have much in common with Jadidist descriptions of Muslim communities in tsarist domains. On a number of occasions Yavshef discusses the plight of women in Xinjiang, easily married and just as easily divorced (though according to one account Yavshef availed himself of this custom, marrying twice in the course of his trip) (1917b). The profligacy of the wealthy elite is another recurrent theme. In Khotan, a rich man from Marghilan invites Yavshef to a three-day long *mashrab* gathering on the outskirts of town. Yavshef recounts with sarcasm how the party commenced with mullahs reading a homily on the virtue of poverty from the letters of the Indian Naqshbandi sheikh Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624). Then the festivities begin: 'It seems that wealth is not such a harmful or corrupting thing after all' (Yavshef 1916c). At a number of points, Yavshef suggests that instead of frittering away their wealth, the richest bays from each of the main towns of Chinese Turkistan pool their capital and form an economic society, to exploit local resources and compete with Russian imports.

Much of what Yavshef inveighs against falls within the category of 'superstition' (*khurāfat*), a cause for deep concern among reformist Muslim intellectuals in Russia. The locals' excessive devotion to saintly shrines is particularly disturbing to Yavshef, and he does his bit to debunk the myths that shroud these sites. At the shrine of the Seven Sleepers in Tuyuq, one of a series of sites in the Islamic world linked to this legend, the sheikh guards the cave that is believed to be where the seven brothers slept (Yasushi 2004). Yavshef resolves to desacralise the shrine by boldly entering into the cave, but fails to talk his way past the sheikh (1915b). Several months later, at the shrine of Satuq Bughra Khan in Artush, Yavshef sees through the legend of the 'Golden Lamp', which supposedly burns when filled with water:

These deceptive sheikhs dip a wick in oil when no one is looking, and wrap it with something that doesn't let water in. Then they put it in the lamp and pour water on top. When they light it, naturally it burns. People who haven't seen the trick and don't know the explanation take it to be one of the Bughra Khan's miracles. (1915e)

Besides fostering superstition, these shrines consumed a great deal of *waqf* wealth (pious endowments), which could be better spent developing the province. Yavshef estimated that in Yarkand alone there was 50,000 *desiatin* (135,000 acres) of *waqf*; if this land was rented out at the low price of four roubles a *desiatin*, it would be enough to fund all levels of education, with enough left over to open new technical schools.

What redeems this bleak picture for Yavshef is the historical significance of Chinese Turkistan. By now, the Tarim Basin was synonymous in the scholarly world with buried cities and ancient manuscripts, and Yavshef was among those Muslim intellectuals who followed the progress of Western scientific expeditions in China and Mongolia. These discoveries were rapidly revising scholarly views not only of the ancient Turkic civilisations of the past but also the distribution and identity of the Turkic-speaking peoples of the present, and Russian Muslim journals carried pieces synthesising the new historical and ethnographic data. Russian Muslims themselves had only a limited presence in these scholarly circles, and Jadidists sought a more active role in accumulating and disseminating scholarly knowledge of the non-Russian peoples of the empire, often turning their hand to ethnography.

A brief notice in *The Translator* informs us that while passing through Tashkent in 1914, Yavshef perused historical manuscripts in the library and lectured to local students, announcing that his goal in Chinese Turkistan was to produce a work on Turkic history (n.a. 1914). According to one study, during his stay in Turkistan's capital, Yavshef associated with the local circle of military orientalists, which included men such as Abubakir Divaev, a Bashkir expert on the nomadic peoples of Turkistan (Turdiev 2004). His stop in Tashkent coincided with that of Zeki Velidi (Togan), an up-and-coming historian on an expedition sponsored by Kazan University, and the two young men may well have met. As Velidi did in Bukhara and the Fergana Valley, Yavshef procured historical manuscripts from various sources along his route through Xinjiang. Among the Sibe in the Ili Valley, for example, he bought a set of historical works in Manchu (Yavshef 1914). These were inscrutable to him, but from a qadi in the village of Qaraqash he obtained something better suited to his needs – a manuscript of Mahmud Churas' late seventeenth-century chronicle of the Chaghatayid khans of Yarkand. From July 1916 onwards his serialised précis of this work, which had simultaneously been discovered by the Russian orientalist V. V. Bartol'd in Tashkent, was published in the pages of *The Council*.⁶ Towards the end of his sojourn on Chinese soil, he was sufficiently acquainted with such works to pen his own studies on the Islamic history of Xinjiang. Besides this interest in history, Yavshef also adopted an ethnographic standpoint at various points in his journey. Among the Manchu-speaking Sibe he dabbled in field linguistics, comparing Sibe and Turkic vocabulary; in the village of Ayköl on the outskirts of Aqsu, he described a 'spirit-summoning' ritual, a custom that was of particular interest to Russian scholars of the period (Yavshef 1914; 1915d).

While Europeans such as Aurel Stein and Sven Hedin scoured the Tarim Basin for evidence of lost Aryan or Indic civilisations, Yavshef too constructed Xinjiang as an ethno-national heartland – that of his own Turko-Tatar nation. The thought that the people and culture of Xinjiang might preserve features of 'pure' Turko-Tatar culture lost elsewhere excited him. In Khotan, he writes, 'most noteworthy is the fact that pure Tatar words can be heard spoken in these parts' (Yavshef 1915h). He exhibits some interest in the region's pre-Islamic Turkic past. In Kashgar, for example, he mentions discussing the merits of the ancient Uyghur script with a Swedish scholar, likely to have been the missionary and linguist Gustaf Raquette (Yavshef 1917d).

Yet it was the relics of the Qarakhanid Dynasty (eleventh to twelfth centuries), the first Turkic-ruling family to adopt Islam, that most attracted him. Recounting his visit to the shrine of Satuq Bughra Khan, his hostility to the sheikh's charlatany contrasts with his reverence for the saint himself. Here he indulges in an uncharacteristic flight of fantasy, conjuring up a conversation with the Qarakhanid monarch. He asks whether the Turks have prospered or declined since Satuq Bughra Khan's day and records the imaginary reply:

The people were numerous, but have decreased. They lived comfortably, but have been reduced to poverty. They were cultured, but have become backward. The language was pure Turkic, it has changed. The people have fallen behind in every way. The cause of this was the arrogant kings, cruel rulers, and selfish scholars who succeeded me. The schools and madrasas filled up with Persian and Arabic books and stories, and the Turk spirit completely vanished. In the place of Turkism and bravery, the customs of dervishes and qalandars triumphed. In short, from that day until now there have been many changes, but none of these changes have been beneficial, they have been harmful. If the changes had led to improvements, then the Easterners would not have fallen behind the Westerners. Instead they would have advanced beyond them. (Yavshef 1915e)

Yavshef's fictitious encounter with Satuq Bughra Khan paid homage to a short story by Ismail Gasprinskii from 1906, entitled 'The Conversation of the Sultans' (Gaspirali 2003), and invites comparison with it. Here Gasprinskii imagines a visit to the crypt of Amir Timur in Samarqand, when suddenly the tombs open and Timur and his teacher Sayyid Baraka emerge. The gathering soon swells with the arrival of nineteenth-century monarchs such as Nasiruddin Shah of Iran, Nasrullah Khan of Bukhara, Ismail Pasha of Egypt, Khudayar Khan of Kokand and Yaqub Beg of Kashgar, and the conversation begins. Stunned by the decline of the Muslims since his days of world conquest, Timur interrogates the sultans as to how this came about. As they struggle to excuse themselves, the anti-colonial theorist Jamal al-Din Afghani (d. 1897) emerges to offer an explanation for the situation, roundly condemning the monarchs' complacency in the face of European modernisation. While Yaqub Beg in Kashgar and Sultan Mahmud in Istanbul had made some efforts towards reform, Afghani pointed to the Caucasian rebel leader Imam Shamil (1797–1871) as the only Muslim leader who had left any dent in Europe's colonial armour.

For Gasprinskii, the encounter with the ghosts of sultans past was a way to critique the nineteenth-century Islamic world's inability to keep pace with Europe's technological and political progress. The morality tale that Yavshef's ventriloquism placed in the mouth of Satuq Bughra Khan sounded a different theme, one better suited to the militant Turkist sentiments that the First World War aroused among some Russian Muslims. The rot did not set in in the nineteenth century, Satuq Bughra Khan told him, but centuries earlier when the heroic traditions of the Turks were diluted by the corrupting influence of Arab and Iranian culture – particularly Sufism ('the customs of dervishes and qalandars'). Yavshef was not an atheist, but he clearly regarded the conversion to Islam as the catalyst for the decline of the Turks. In a subsequent essay on 'Islamic identity and nationhood' he elaborated on this point, pointing the finger squarely at Iranian mysticism: 'the Persian axe ... completely uprooted the tree of Turkism' (Yavshef 1917d).

Yavshef places this narrative of Turkic decline in the context of competition between East and West. He was travelling at a crucial time in the history of the Muslim and colonial worlds, entering Xinjiang just as the First World War was breaking out and leaving as the war reached its end. In such a context, Yavshef was not anti-Chinese by any stretch of the imagination. In Russia, the Jadidist ethos of cultural revival had emerged in response to a perceived threat from Orthodox Russia's assimilationist policies. China, by contrast, was viewed as no threat to the world's Muslims and indeed was a potential anti-colonial ally. Russian Muslim intellectuals had welcomed the 1911 Chinese revolution and the downfall of the Qing Dynasty. For the time being, it looked as if China had leapfrogged Russia, politically if not socially, in replacing a dynastic

system with a republic. For his part, Yavshef had no doubt that the Chinese authorities would support the economic and cultural reforms that he proposed. It was up to the locals, as he saw it, to educate themselves sufficiently to engage in Chinese politics and avail themselves of the opportunities that the new Chinese Republic offered.

The publications to which Yavshef contributed found a small local readership in Xinjiang, and he was in the province for long enough to assess the reception of his views on the necessary course of reform in Xinjiang. In April 1915, he wrote from Kashgar on the pressing need for Muslims in China to establish a Spiritual Board, along the lines of those that existed in parts of Russia. This was, for him, a remedy for all of the community's woes: 'In order to set straight the scientific, intellectual, religious, moral, national, literary, material and economic affairs of the Muslims of China, the most necessary and urgent thing is a Spiritual Board' (Yavshef 1915c). Yet his call drew only a lacklustre response from his Kashgari readers. 'The Chinese Muslims did not pay the slightest attention to that article', he complained six months later, 'since they don't know what a spiritual board is. After that article appeared in Kashgar, people were going around asking 'what is a spiritual board?'' (Yavshef 1915f).

This episode highlights something of a paradox in Yavshef's, and indeed the entire Jadidist approach to Xinjiang, which allows us to comprehend the local ambivalence to his calls for reform. Among Russian Muslims, Russian dominance was a given, and centralising institutions such as the Spiritual Board were seen as a way to preserve some limited autonomy in Islamic affairs. By urging Muslims in China to engage in centralising projects such as this, though, Yavshef was effectively promoting a strategy that would likely see the imposition of greater Chinese supervision of Muslim life in remote regions such as Xinjiang. For Muslims in a place like Kashgar, that could well be seen as a step backwards. That is to say, Yavshef's discourse of Islamic revival was more specific to the Russian context than he was willing to admit. Since, as he believed, political conditions in China did not present the same barriers to Muslim progress existing in Russia, it could hardly be expected that Muslims in China would be politicised in exactly the same way as those Muslims who were tsarist subjects, or that they would be drawn to exactly the same programme of reform. Yet this is what he expected of them, and he was naturally disappointed when they failed to meet these expectations.

Conclusion

Yavshef intended his trip to Chinese Turkistan to be the first step in a global expedition *à la* Abdüreshid Ibrahim. In private correspondence, he indicated that upon completing his circuit of the province he would head south to India (Fakhr al-Dīn 1917). Finding himself in Kashgar in early 1917, though, word reached him of the February Revolution in Russia and the transformations that were taking place in his native land. Excited at the news he cut his travels short and returned to Russian territory, arriving in Tashkent in April, where he was soon enrolled in the Russian army. Meanwhile he renewed his connections with the local intellectual and political scene and lent his support to those lobbying for Turkistani autonomy within a new, democratic Russia. One of his last published pieces was in *The Council* in October 1917 (Yavshef 1917e), welcoming the declaration of an Autonomous Turkistan in Kokand – a bid for self-rule that the Red Army eventually suppressed. With a few days of this article's publication, Yavshef was dead. Sources skirt around the precise circumstances of his death, but it seems most likely that he fell in street fighting against local Bolsheviks, who had seized power in the name of the Tashkent Soviet.⁷

Given his evident pan-Turkist sympathies, it is tempting to speculate whether or not Yavshef's trip to Xinjiang had some other secret purpose. During the First World War, Xinjiang served as a refuge for anti-tsarist Russian Muslims suspected of Ottoman sympathies. In places

like Ghulja and Kashgar, Yavshef socialised with men who strongly supported the Ottoman cause, and besides these there were many Ottoman subjects in Xinjiang. For the first few years of the conflict, Chinese officials turned a blind eye to pro-Ottoman activities in Xinjiang. Taking advantage of this laxity, local patrons of education recruited from Istanbul Young Turk schoolteachers such as Ahmed Kemal to work in Xinjiang. Ahmed Kemal met Yavshef and refers to him in his memoirs of China as his ‘dear friend’ (İlku 1997, 137). Yavshef likewise mentions the Turk in passing, when describing the local controversy that developed around his school (1916b).

Yet for Yavshef, travelling to a little known part of the Turkic world and writing about it was probably contribution enough to the national revival, and there is no need to look for a conspiracy behind his visit. He intended his return to Tashkent in 1917 to be a short side trip, before continuing on his way. Tellingly, his very last published article was not an intervention into the revolutionary tumult going on around him, but a reprisal of the romantic sentiments that his travels had inspired in him. In ‘Folk Literature in Altishahr’, he depicts Chinese Turkistan as a land of female songstresses, where every young girl learns to strum the *duitar*, and suitors woo their coy beloveds with lines from classical poetry (Yavshef 1917f).

We cannot know what Yavshef would have done with his collected writings at the end of his travels, or what sort of Turkic history he might have produced. Notwithstanding its premature end, though, Yavshef’s literary career retains its interest as a unique engagement with Xinjiang Muslim society from a Russian Muslim perspective. His work represents the most sustained application of Jadidist ethnographic and historical research to the Muslims of Chinese Turkistan, infused with both reformist cultural criticism and racialised notions of Turkic and pan-Asian solidarity. As with much that is of interest in this period, such intellectual experiments were destined not to last beyond the events of 1917. Not only did the Russian Revolution signal the end of the Jadidist press that had published his work, it also curtailed the free flow of commercial and intellectual traffic between Russian and Chinese Turkistan. From this point on, Russian Muslim intellectuals following in Yavshef’s footsteps in Xinjiang were much more likely to be escaping into political exile than seeking literary acclaim on a world tour.

Notes

1. Yavshef’s name in Tatar is Nūshīrvān Shēr-i Yazdān oġlı Yavushev (Нәүширван Ширияздан улы Яушев). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.
2. For other studies of Yavshef, see Ōishi (1998) and Turdiev (2004). My thanks to Gulchekhra Sultonova and Salima Madyarova for providing me with a copy of Turdiev’s article.
3. On the Yavshef aristocratic lineage, see Khairtdinov et al. (2009, 419–422) (my thanks to Allan Frank for informing me of this source). Some members of the family were prominent entrepreneurs in Nushirvan’s day, but his relationship to these wealthy Yavshevfs is unclear.
4. For discussion of local circuits of shrine visitation in the Tarim Basin, see Thum (2014).
5. While little has been written on Şükrü, the literature on Ibrahim is extensive. A recent contribution in English is Ōzbek (2003).
6. See O. Akimushkin’s comments in Churās (2010, 11–12). The fate of this Qaraqash manuscript is unknown.
7. Against this interpretation it should be noted that Zeki Velidi seems to have regarded Yavshef as a fellow-traveller of the Bolsheviks. Velidi’s memoirs include a letter that he wrote from Kabul in 1922 to the exiled Turkistani leader Mustafa Choqay, in which he outlines what he saw as Bolshevik strategies to co-opt Russian Muslim intellectuals, among them Nushirvan Yavshef (Togan 2012, 361). Velidi clearly erred in including the long-dead Yavshef in this group, but it suggests something of the way Yavshef may have been regarded by his contemporaries.

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