

= Turks in the Tang military =

The military of the Tang Dynasty was staffed with a large population of Turkic soldiers , referred to as Tujue in Chinese sources . Tang elites in northern China were familiar with Turkic culture , a factor that contributed to the Tang acceptance of Turkic recruits . The Tang emperor Taizong adopted the title of " Heavenly Kaghan " and promoted a cosmopolitan empire . Taizong regularly recruited and promoted military officers of Turkic ancestry , whose steppe experience contributed to the western and northern expansion of the Tang empire . The Turkic general Ashina She'er participated in the Tang capture of the Karakhoja , Karasahr , and Kucha kingdoms in Xinjiang . The half @-@ Turkic general An Lushan started a revolt that led to the decline of Tang Dynasty .

The Orkhon inscriptions by the Gokturks were critical of the Turks that had served the Tang Dynasty , and condemned them for helping the Chinese emperor expand his burgeoning empire . The Turkic soldiers stationed by the Chinese in the Tang garrisons of Central Asia settled in the region , spreading Turkic languages in an area that had been predominantly Indo @-@ European .

= = Background = =

The empire of the Tang Dynasty was more cosmopolitan and diverse than the earlier Han Dynasty . The Tang Dynasty elites of northern China had an interest in Turkic culture and intermingled with the people of the steppes . The setting of one Tang poem describes a yurt , and the performance of a Turkic actress was hosted in the emperor 's palace Following the Tang Dynasty 's defeat of the Eastern Turkic Khaganate , the government authorized the settlement of Turks along the borders of the Tang empire . Turkic officers of the former khaganate were recruited as generals in the Tang military , and their experience with steppe warfare contributed to the Tang 's military successes as it expanded westward .

= = = Emperor Taizong and multiculturalism = = =

Emperor Taizong , also known by his personal name Li Shimin , was familiar with the culture of the steppe nomads and employed military strategies using steppe tactics as a prince . Taizong was a skilled horseman , and during a celebration of his victory and ascension to the throne , sacrificed a horse in a ritual derived from a Turkic religious practice . He was able to outmaneuver the heavy cavalry of the Sui Dynasty with his light cavalry , a characteristic of steppe warfare . Taizong shared personal relationships with Turkic allies as a prince , reinforced through oaths sworn as blood brothers . His later successes as an emperor against the armies of Central Asia through diplomacy and divide and rule are the result of his early experiences with Turkic culture .

Taizong 's adoption of the Heavenly Kaghan title was used to legitimize his role as a steppe khan not solely as a Chinese emperor with the title of Son of Heaven . He valued the kaghan title and was sincere about his role as a leader of Central Asia . He sought to solidify his claim as a kaghan by organizing a gathering of Turkic leaders in the Lingzhou fortress during the last years of his reign to reconfirm his title .

While mostly symbolic , the title of Heavenly Kaghan shows Taizong 's open attitudes towards the existence of a multicultural and ethnically diverse Tang empire . Taizong was proud of his policies promoting ethnic equality , and was reported to have said that , " The emperors since ancient times have all appreciated the Chinese and depreciated the barbarians . Only I view them as equal . That is why they look upon me as their parent . "

He had a paternalistic attitude towards his subjects and believed that it was his duty to treat the Chinese and foreign ethnic groups as equals under one ruler . Taizong 's views grew into state policy as his government recruited Turkic and other non @-@ Han Chinese soldiers into the Tang military . Turkic soldiers were later promoted to higher ranks as commanders and generals . The surname of Li , belonging to the royal family of Li Shimin , was awarded to Han and non @-@ Han officers for their service .

Tang relationship with the Turks may have further deepened had the crown prince Li Chengqian , a

Turkophile , been enthroned as Taizong 's successor . Li Chengqian enthusiastically embraced Turkic customs , and Chinese historian Sima Guang recorded that he :

" He [Chengqian] lved to emulate Turkish speech and their manner of dress . He chose from among his retinue those who had Turkish features and grouped them in bands of five ; he made them plait their hair , wear sheepskins , and herd sheep . He had made five wolf 's head banners and tents and set up yurts . The crown prince took up residence here ; he gathered sheep and cooked them , and then , drawing out his waist @-@ knife , he would carve the meat and let everyone eat . "

Chengqian was deposed as crown prince by Taizong after his plans to usurp the throne were revealed . He was exiled by Taizong and died as a commoner .

= = Turkic generals and Tang military campaigns = =

Turkic generals led many of the Tang Dynasty military campaigns that expanded the dynasty 's territorial reach into Central Asia . In total , ten Turks were able to reach the highest military position of general . Ashina She 'er , formerly the ruler of Beshbaliq and Kharakhoja between 630 and 635 and a member of the Ashina clan , was recruited as a Tang general in 635 . He fought as a commander in a successful campaign against Karakhoja in 640 . She 'er was chosen as the general for the military expedition against Karasahr . The Tang loyalist that had been installed as ruler after the first invasion of Karasahr in 644 by Chinese general Guo Xiaoke was deposed by his cousin in a revolt . The usurper was executed after the rebellion was suppressed , and Tang governance returned to the oasis state . She 'er continued onward to the nearby kingdom of Kucha , a state that had supported Karasahr during its war against the Tang .

Emperor Taizong himself tended to the injuries of the Turkic Generals Qibi Heli and Ashina Simo , who were both wounded during the campaign against Goguryeo .

Ashina Zhong , the brother of She 'er , also served as a Turkic general of the Tang Dynasty , and was a participant in a military performance hosted by Emperor Gaozong in 655 . Another Turkic member of the Ashina clan , Ashina Helu , briefly served as a commander of the Tang army in Gansu before his rise as a kaghan of the Western Turkic Khaganate . During his reign , the Turkic tribes were unified under a single leader . Emperor Gaozong , Taizong 's successor , dispatched a military expedition in 657 against Helu , who had been raiding Tang settlements . The campaign was led by the general Su Dingfang and the Turkic commanders Ashina Mishe and Ashina Buzhen , who were opposed to Helu . Helu was defeated and captured by the Tang forces , and the territories annexed from the Western Turks were placed under Tang governance through the Anxi Protectorate .

Gaozong awarded the military service of the Turkic commanders Mishe and Buzhen by appointing them as proxy rulers of ten Western Turkic tribes . The ten tribes were split between the two cousins , and the western half was given to Buzhen while Mishe controlled the eastern tribes . In 685 , the sons of Mishe and Buzhen were sent from the Tang capital of Chang 'an , where they resided , to succeed their fathers in the west . Neither lasted long as Turkic rulers ; one was overthrown by his tribal subjects and the other was deposed by the Second Turkic Khaganate after an invasion in 690 .

An Lushan was a Tang general of mixed Turkic and Soghdian ancestry whose revolt between 755 and 763 , the An Shi Rebellion , devastated the Tang Dynasty . Unlike the majority of Turkic military officers , An Lushan served the Tang as an official closely involved with the politics of the imperial court , rather than as a general in a garrison on the Tang frontier . The dynasty might have collapsed had it not been for their alliance with the Uyghur Turks . The rebellion diminished the Tang enthusiasm for cosmopolitanism that was a characteristic of the dynasty 's earlier years .

The Orkhon inscriptions , a memorial erected by the Turks , lamented the Tang influence on the Turks and the Turkic adoption of Chinese titles :

" The Turkish people let their state go to ruin ... their sons worthy of becoming lords became slaves , and their daughters worthy of becoming ladies became servants to the Chinese people . The Turkish lords abandoned their Turkish titles . Those lords who were in China held the Chinese

titles and obeyed the Chinese emperor and gave their service to him for fifty years . For the benefit of the Chinese , they went on campaigns up to [the land of] the Bukli qaghan in the east , where the sun rises , and as far as the Iron Gate in the West . For the benefit of the Chinese emperor they conquered countries . "

The inscriptions , made to commemorate the elites of the Second Turkic Empire , stress the importance of loyalty between a kaghan and the ruler 's subjects . The Turks that sided with the Tang are condemned , and the disunity of the Turkic tribes is blamed on a lack of respect for the authority of the kaghan .

= = Historical significance = =

The Turkic soldiers and generals that worked in the Chinese garrisons of Central Asia spurred Turkic migration into the area . The Turkic language and culture of the Tang soldiers there gradually displaced the indigenous Indo @-@ European languages . The native languages of Sogdian and Tokharian disappeared as the Turkic languages spread in the Tarim Basin .

The Tang Dynasty declined after the An Shi Rebellion , and the dynasty eventually fell in 907 . During the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period , an era of upheaval following the dynasty 's collapse , many of the kingdoms in China were ruled by families of Turkic ancestry . The Shatuo Turks founded the Later Tang in 923 , the Later Jin in 936 , and the Later Han in 947 .