

*Potanin's Journey in North-western China and Eastern Tibet.*

We are indebted to M. Veniukoff for the following abstract\* of M. Potanin's lecture, delivered before the East Siberian Section of the Russian Geographical Society, on his travels in China, at Irkutsk, in December 1886.

Potanin's expedition started from Peking in 1884, with the intention of crossing the desert of Ordos (Ortus) to Lang-chau, capital of Kan-suh, and penetrating thence as far south as possible. The party started on the 13th May for Kuku-khoto (or Kwei-hwa-cheng), passing over the triple chain of mountains dividing the plain of Peking from that on which Kuku-khoto is situate. The southernmost of these three ridges bears the Chinese name of U-tai-shan, "the mountain of five sacrificial altars," after the group of five peaks, the highest of which is 10,000 feet above the sea, a height not exceeded by any mountain in Northern China. At its southern foot lies a valley remarkable for its Buddhist monasteries and shrines, one of which, "Shing-tung-tze," is entirely made of brass, whence its name.

Kuku-khoto is the depôt for the Mongolian trade with China. It contains 200 tea-shops, five theatres, 15 temples, and six Mongol monasteries. Among its sights are the Buddhist convent of Utassa with its five pinnacles and bas-reliefs, the convent of Fing-sung-si, and a temple containing a statue erected in honour of the Chinese general Pai-jin-jung, who avenged an insult offered to the Emperor of China.

Leaving Kuku-khoto the expedition crossed the Yellow river and entered the sand-wastes of Ordos.† The Mongols of Ordos are ranged under seven †*koshungs* or banners under seven princes, the chief authority being vested in one who has the longest family tree and bears the title of "Wang." Their holiest place is a collection of felt tents called "Edjen-joro," reputed to contain the bones of Jenghiz Khan. These sacred relics are entrusted to the care of a caste of Darhats numbering some fifty families. Every summer, on the twenty-first day of the sixth moon, sacrifices are offered up in his honour, when numbers of people congregate to join in the celebration, such gatherings being called *táilgan*.

On the southern border of Ordos are the ruins of Borobalgassun, said to date from Jenghiz Khan's time. From this place the expedition went to Lang-chau, in the valley of the Yellow river, surrounded by fruit gardens which continue along the river for about 40 miles. To the south lie hills covered with thick deposits of loess, and the river cuts its way through these, forming a narrow gorge. Many of the

\* Translated by Mr. E. D. Morgan.

† Fully described by Prejevalsky in his work 'Mongolia,' &c., vol. i. pp. 180-195 *et passim*.

‡ Prejevalsky says *six*, and gives their names. Cf. 'Mongolia,' &c., vol. i. p. 144.

inhabitants live in artificially constructed caves, probably since the Mahomedan insurrection which destroyed so many villages and towns, and laid waste the country.

M. Potanin, who was accompanied by his wife, visited the territory of the Salars,\* a Turkish tribe, which has preserved its written and spoken language almost unaltered. This tribe inhabits twenty-four villages near Siun-hwa-ting, on the south bank of the Yellow river. Another interesting people visited by the travellers were the Amdos Mongols, identical with the "Taldi" or "Daldes" of Prejevalsky,† scattered over a tract lying between the meridians of Lang-chau and Suh-chau, and partly engaged in agriculture and horticulture. Their language is a mixture of Mongolian, Turkish, and Chinese words; their houses, food, and dress are Chinese, while the costume of their women, especially their head-dress, is peculiar. The Amdos are governed by elders, whose office is hereditary, and who trace their descent from a half historical, half legendary prince, Li-ching-wang, whose tomb is shown on the bank of the Sining-gol near Shang-dang. Some of the Amdos profess Islam, others retain Lamaism.

Potanin and his travelling companion Skaasi had an audience of the governor of Si-ning, who gave them a free pass for Eastern Tibet. During a part of their journey they had an escort of twenty Tangutan or Tibetan soldiers officered by a monk.

From Si-ning the travellers set out for Ming-chau, passed over so-called *tangs* or high plateaux (about 10,000 feet), thickly clothed with herbaceous vegetation. To the west of their road rose two snowy groups of mountains—Amni †-jakar and Amni-tungling. The town of Gui-wei on the Yellow river, the fortress of Bónnan, and the monasteries of Labrang and Joni were successively visited. At Labrang they were received with much ceremony by the chief Lama or *gegen*, who, besides his spiritual functions, exercised temporal sway over the district and had a military force at his command. Joni is the residence of a Tangutan prince named Joni-bombu.

From Ming-chau the expedition turned southward, but were prevented from penetrating farther than Sung-pang-ting, their supplies having come to an end. The country between Ming-chau and Sung-pang-ting is described as a labyrinth of steep ranges of mountains and deep valleys, where the views, even from the summits of the passes, are too limited to enable the observer to form any clear idea of the general direction of the ridges and valleys. The scenery, however, offers many points of interest. River torrents, cascades, and natural terraces lend a charming variety to the landscape, while the roads, only passable for pack animals, here clinging to the rocky steep, or cut into the rock itself, there

\* Cf. 'Mongolia,' &c., vol. ii. p. 149.

† Cf. 'Mongolia,' &c., vol. ii. pp. 69 *seq.* and 299 *seq.*

‡ Or "Amneh," i. e. "ancestors," held sacred by the Tangutans: cf. 'Mongolia,' &c., vol. ii. p. 76.

supported on wooden props, or carried across the stream on rickety suspension bridges which rock to and fro under the laden mule, remind the traveller of the wild alpine country he has entered. Rains too were frequent, for the Chinese monsoons deposit their moisture on these ranges and call into existence a luxuriant vegetation. The hills from top to bottom were densely forested with conifers in the upper zone, deciduous trees and bushes on the lower slopes. Here were observed three kinds of maple, the lime, the hazel, a prickly-leaved oak like the *ilex* with fruit branches like the strings of copper coins current in the country, whence the Chinese call it the "money-tree." Here too amidst the undergrowth were the tall stems of the bamboo and several sub-tropical ferns. Maize is cultivated in the deeper valleys, and round the villages a sheaf-like variety of bamboo, *Diospyros Kaki*,\* yielding a fruit, the *si-tsi*; the soap-tree, the varnish-tree, palms (*Chamaerops*), and bananas. The deciduous woods of the upper belts at a height of 9000 feet were fringed with bushes of rhododendron of two or three kinds, one of arborescent growth, with a trunk eight inches in diameter. In the alpine zone above the limit of the forests, four kinds of poppy were observed, one yellow (*Calthcartia integrifolia*), two blue, and one red.

Sung-pang is an important trade centre, and lies on the road taken by the tea caravans, passing from Szechuen to Northern Tibet. This is one of the three main roads to Lhâsa followed by the pilgrims from China and Mongolia. The environs of Sung-pang are famous for their monasteries or "bonbo," the objects of veneration to the Tangutan population. Thirteen miles north-east of Sung-pang is the snowy Siue-shan, at whose foot flows a rivulet, the Kserntso, "golden lake," really a succession of small lakes divided by thin walls of tufa, one above the other.

From Sung-pang the expedition returned to Lang-chau via Lang-an-fu, Ven-hsien, Tso-chau, Hung-chang-fu, and Di-dao. They passed the winter at the monastery of Kumbum, south of Si-ning, where they saw the relics of the mother of Tsoukaba, the great Buddhist reformer, and the miraculous tree described by Abbé Huc.

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### *A Journey in Northern and Eastern Manchuria.*

THE 'Proceedings' for December last † contained an account of a journey undertaken by Messrs. James, Younghusband, and Fulford to the Pei-shan Mountain and the sources of the Sungari. Mr. James, one of the party, informs us that the three travellers have since continued their explorations in Northern and Eastern Manchuria, and visited parts

\* A species of date plum, sometimes called the "Keg-fig"; the French sweetmeats *figues-casques* are made from its fruit.

† 'Proceedings R.G.S.,' 1886, p. 779.