

ON THE TRAIL OF THE OPIUM POPPY

A NARRATIVE OF TRAVEL
IN THE CHIEF OPIUM-PRODUCING PROVINCES
OF CHINA

BY
SIR ALEXANDER HOSIE, M.A., LL.D., F.R.G.S.

LATE H.B.M. CONSUL-GENERAL, TIENTSIN, CHINA
AUTHOR OF "THREE YEARS IN WESTERN CHINA," "MANCHURIA: ITS PEOPLE
RESOURCES AND RECENT HISTORY," ETC. ETC.

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CHAPTER XI

CHENG TU TO THE PROVINCE OF YÜNNAN

THE city of Chengtu, or Chengtu Fu, the capital of the province of Szechuan, in lat. $30^{\circ} 40'$ N. and long. $104^{\circ} 4'$ E., lies within two districts—Chengtu Hsien and Hua-yang Hsien. It is situated on the eastern side of a magnificent plain—the granary of the province—measuring some 90 miles long by 40 miles broad, with a splendid network of irrigation canals which ensure its fertility all the year round. These canals draw their water supplies from the Min River at the district city of Kuan Hsien on the western edge of the plain where the river, issuing from a valley to the west, has cut its way through a low range of hills leaving a high, rocky bluff against which it dashes, and by which the main channel is diverted southwards. Between the rocky bluff and the city of Kuan Hsien, which lies high up on the north or left bank, a channel has been artificially cut through the range, and by an elaborate system of low, stone dykes a part of the river has been deflected eastwards and from this numerous smaller channels or canals, some of them navigable by small craft, cross the plain, afterwards rejoining the parent river further

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south and, in one or two cases, flowing north of Chengtu eastwards to the T'o River, across which we were ferried at the large market-town of Niu-fo-tu. This engineering feat was the work of one Li Ping and his son, whose memories are still kept green by two fine temples erected in their honour, one on the left bank and the other on the bluff. In that on the left bank carved on a stone tablet is Li Ping's advice to future generations: "Dig the channels deep and keep the dykes low." This advice is rigidly adhered to. By means of a wooden movable barrage higher up the river the current is diverted first to one and then to the other bank to allow the silt to be dug out annually from the various channels, while the dykes, built of boulders packed in bamboo crates, are at the same time put in order and kept low enough to allow the water to overflow from one channel to another, thereby preventing the surrounding country from being flooded. A Prefect known as the Shui-li Fu, who resides at Kuan Hsien, is in charge of these irrigation works, and in March every year the duty of opening the barrage and diverting the water on to the plain is carried out with great ceremony by the Taotai, or Intendant of Circuit of Chengtu, who proceeds to Kuan Hsien for the purpose.

Chengtu is surrounded by a high brick wall, $9\frac{1}{10}$ miles in length, as imposing and in better condition than the wall of the Tartar city of Peking. It has a gate in each of its four sides; but while the north and south gates are approximately central, the east and west gates lie respectively more to the south and north. Within the city, abutting on the greater part of the west wall and on the western end of the south wall, enclosing the west gate, is the Manchu city, surrounded on its other sides by a much

lower wall with four gates, so that to leave the city by the west gate one has to pass through the northern end of the Manchu city. To the east of the latter and towards the centre of Chengtu is another enclosure called the Imperial city with old dilapidated walls. This, erroneously called the Imperial residence or palace of the Sovereigns of the Minor Han Dynasty (A.D. 221-263), was merely the residence of a Prince, one of the sons of Hung Wu, the first Emperor of the Ming Dynasty, who was sent to govern Szechuan. There are large suburbs outside the east and north gates. The principal business quarter of the city runs westward from the east gate, where there are broad streets and many fine shops for the sale of foreign goods of every description and silk and satins for which the looms of Chengtu are famous. It is a rich city, and for a Chinese city exceedingly clean. During my residence there from 1903 to 1905, there was a considerable amount of land used as market gardens within the city walls, and it was valued at about 420 taels (£50) per English acre; but much of it was now built over and prices had risen from 5000 to 6000 taels (£620 to £750) an acre according to situation. On my arrival in Chengtu in 1903 one of my first steps was to apply to the Viceroy for an authoritative statement of the population of the city. A census was then being taken and, on its completion, I was informed that the number of families inside the walls and in the suburbs was 55,058. Taking five as the average size of a family would give a population of some 275,000; but Chengtu is the home of thousands of retired and expectant officials occupying residences each with its servants and hangers-on practically forming a small village in itself, and it seems to me that the average might be

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reckoned more reasonably at eight than five. On this basis the inhabitants of Chengtu, inside and outside the walls, would number 440,464 and I am of opinion that 500,000 should be accepted as the outside estimate of the population.

I have spoken of the silks and satins of Chengtu and I may mention that the city contains 6000 looms, while outside the walls there are as many as 3400 looms for the manufacture of silk crapes. There are, too, 500 gauze looms in and around the city with numerous ribbon looms, and the weaving of silk braid by hand may be seen in almost every street.

Many changes had taken place in Chengtu since I left it in 1905. A house for the Provincial Assembly, consisting of 107 members, and new Law Courts in foreign style had been erected ; a new Arsenal three miles to the south-east of the city had been built in place of the old Arsenal within the city, which was now occupied with cartridge-making and minting ; electric lighting and telephone services were being installed ; and the streets were up for the reception of wooden water-pipes to conduct water from the river outside the south gate, where it was being raised by four large wheels similar to those used for irrigation purposes. If the Provincial Government had not been idle, the missionary bodies at the provincial capital had not been less zealous. Canadian and American hospitals and schools on a large scale had been constructed in the city, and outside the south wall four missionary bodies had purchased 68 English acres of land whereon class-rooms and dormitories for male Chinese students were built, and very comfortable residences for the foreign teaching staff were in course of

completion. Each missionary body had its own schools, and it was proposed to establish an International University for Chinese, as well as a school for the children of missionaries, at a later date. With this end in view negotiations were proceeding for the purchase of additional land to round off this considerable estate. The Church Missionary Society had a hostel in course of erection within the city, and there, too, the Canadian Methodist Mission has established a printing press in a fine large building where some sixty Chinese workmen under the superintendence of two British missionaries are constantly busy turning out religious and secular books in Chinese, Tibetan and European languages. Here, also, a new script, the invention of a British missionary, was being printed for use among one of the Miao-tzu tribes in Yünnan and Kueichou which has no written language.

The Chinese Post Office, which in 1905 had only one European on the staff, was now manned by three, and, what is more to the point, the postal district of which Chengtu is the directing centre was now self-supporting.

In the east of the province I had found that the ten-cash copper coin issued by the Szechuan mint at Chengtu was worth only seven to eight of the old cash ; but in the provincial capital it passed for what it represented itself to be. •In Chengtu the ratio between silver and copper is fixed from day to day. When I entered the city I noticed the rate posted as \$1 = 1090 cash ; but one does not really get 1090 cash for a dollar, for the Chengtu rate, as in many other places, is the 98 rate, that is to say, 98 cash are reckoned as 100 and a string of cash, nominally 1000, contains only 980. This further means that the cash are

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good cash, for a much higher exchange will be obtained if the string contains small, worn or debased cash. When, however, the unfortunate foreign traveller engages labour he is made to understand that *man ch'ien* (100 not 98) have to be paid and that no debased cash will be accepted ; but I do not suppose for a moment that the dollars or silver in which the employés are paid are converted into *man ch'ien*, or that good, full-sized cash are always demanded. They prefer the higher exchange and palm off the debased with the good cash. In other words, the traveller has to pay more than the cash market value of his silver.

During my few days' stay in Chengtu I exchanged calls with the Acting Viceroy of Szechuan who assured me that the poppy had been eradicated from the province, an assurance which was borne out by all the missionaries I met in Chengtu and their correspondents at out-stations as well as by my own investigation. From the middle of April to the middle of November, that is during the season of high water, junks of medium draught ascend the Min River and its eastern branch as far as Chengtu ; but large, heavily laden junks tranship their cargoes into smaller craft either at Chia-ting Fu or at Chiang-k'ou, and during the winter months, passenger junks usually remain at Chiang-k'ou. In February, 1905, I was able to travel all the way by water from Chengtu to the port of Ichang in the province of Hupei ; but my junk, small and of light draught,* had repeatedly to be dragged over the pebbly bottom of the Chengtu River. On the present occasion I had to engage a passenger junk at Chiang-k'ou, whither I sent my baggage by small open boats, while I travelled overland the forty odd miles that separate Chengtu from Chiang-k'ou. As it was impossible to cover this distance by chair in one day, I

left Chengtu on the 8th March, spent the night at the market-town of Chung-hsing-ch'ang, thirteen miles south of Chengtu, and arrived at Chiang-k'ou on the evening of the following day, where I found my travelling junk ready to take me down river to Hsü-chou Fu at the junction of the Min with the Yangtze. On the way to Chiang-k'ou the road crosses the river by two large, red sandstone bridges, and later we crossed it twice by ferry. To the east of the river, as to the west, the country is flat, forming as it does part of the great Chengtu plain. Rape, sometimes over six feet high, was in full yellow bloom ; broad beans in flower were being cut down for fodder ; wheat was less plentiful ; and peas and a purple-flowered tare were small in quantity. Catkins were bursting from the buds of alders and willows which lined the banks of watercourses and irrigation canals. Spring had come, but there was no song of birds to welcome its arrival—only the humming of bees as they flitted from flower to flower in the rape and bean fields.

In my written contract with the skipper of the junk he undertook to land me at Hsü-chou Fu, some 210 miles by water, weather permitting, in four days, and we were off from Chiang-k'ou at daylight on the morning of the 10th March. Darkness saw us moored at the village of Hsia-yen-kuan on the left bank less than a mile to the north of Ch'ing-shen Hsien, having accomplished only 38 miles ; but shallows delayed our progress, and, although they continued to give us trouble the next day, we succeeded in covering the remaining 40 miles to Chia-ting Fu before nightfall. I urged the skipper to go on till dark ; but it was useless, as provisions had to be laid in and Chia-ting was the home of several members of the crew.

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Under the south-east corner of the city wall of Chia-ting Fu the Min River is joined by the T'ung River which flows east with such velocity that it dashes across the Min, and is not deflected south until it impinges on the bare, red sandstone cliffs forming the latter's left bank. The result is a rapid which causes considerable trouble to ascending junks. The T'ung River is made up of the Ta-tu River and the Ya Ho, which unite about five miles to the west of Chia-ting Fu. Both come from the north-west and are navigated for some distance mostly by rafts some 30 feet long and ten broad built of whole bamboos, with raised platforms on which goods are stowed. Each raft has a high, curved prow, a continuation of the flat bottom, to prevent its being swamped at the numerous rapids which soon stop navigation by junk. Down the Ta-tu River come coal, lime, iron pans, potash, medicines and rafts of timber, while wool, skins and medicines descend the Ya Ho. The up-river cargo is almost entirely salt from the Wu-tung-ch'iao brine wells which lie along the left bank of the Min River to the south of Chia-ting Fu.

The provincial capital is 1700 feet above sea-level, Chia-ting Fu is 1200 feet, and there is a further drop of 400 feet between Chia-ting Fu and Hsü-chou Fu. With the addition of the T'ung River there was no longer any difficulty with shallows, and, starting on the morning of the 12th March, we moored in the evening at the market-town* of Ni-ch'i-ch'ang on the left bank, 73 miles from Chia-ting Fu and 60 miles from Hsü-chou Fu. Midway between Chia-ting Fu and Chien-wei Hsien, a district city on the right bank, we passed a large number of salt junks loading salt from the Wu-tung-ch'iao brine wells, and rafts laden with coal, each raft carrying nearly four tons, were crossing

the river from the right to the left bank and ascending a small tributary leading to the wells. The hills forming the banks of the river were frequently terraced to their summits with crops of yellow rape, broad beans, wheat and peas, and they were at the same time well wooded with bamboo, cypress, pine, *Cunninghamia*, oak, *Machilus Nanmu*, and other trees. Along the river face were many quarries where red sandstone slabs for building and paving were being turned out. Heavily-laden junks, sometimes with as many as 32 trackers, were bound up-river, and scattered along the river were numerous skiffs with cormorants perched on their sides looking out for their prey. Every angler worthy of the name must be highly endowed with the virtue of patience. So must be the cormorant, for I did not see a single catch on the whole length of the river from Chia-ting Fu to Hsü-chou Fu, off the east gate of which, in accordance with the terms of the contract, we moored on the afternoon of the 13th March, four days from Chiang-k'ou. The mouth of the river, which was of a deep blue, is much narrowed by a long bank of shingle projecting into it from the left bank.

The prefectural city of Hsü-chou Fu, generally called Sui Fu, with its district city of I-pin Hsien, is irregularly built on a high bluff forming the left bank of the Yangtsze and the right bank of the Min. It is the *entrepôt* for that part of the trade between the provinces of Yünnan and Szechuan which follows the valleys of the Heng and Nan-kuang rivers, tributaries of the Yangtsze from the south, the former some thirty miles to the south-west and the latter five miles to the east of the city. It lies in the centre of a great sugar-growing country, and its population, computed at about 200,000, combines with the production

of sugar the manufacture of sweatmeats and the preserving of fruits and ginger, which are sold in small earthenware jars. It is also the centre of mat-weaving from the rushes of *Juncus effusus*, which is largely cultivated in the neighbourhood. These mats, which measure five to six feet long and three to four feet wide, are woven on vertical looms consisting of two upright beams, joined at top and bottom by stout round poles and firmly embedded in the ground several feet apart. Under the lower and over the top of the upper pole a large number of hemp strings about half an inch apart are arranged and tied to form a web ; but before the circuit is completed each string is passed through an oak bar, parallel with the poles, several feet long, three inches wide and three inches deep, with two handles six inches long protruding in front and two feet apart. On the top of this bar are alternate small holes and one and a half inch horizontal slits, and through these the strings are threaded, coming out on the opposite side underneath in similar slits and holes ; but each hole on the top of the bar is represented by a slit on the under side and *vice versa*. By raising the bar with the two handles and pushing it over, the web is opened—each string being pulled in the opposite direction to its next neighbour in the space below the bar, and by raising the bar and depressing the handles another space is formed ; but in the latter case the strings are reversed. These movements are made alternately and into the spaces below the bar the rushes are fed, one at a time, by a man sitting at the side of the loom. He takes a rush, bends the end of it over a notch near the tip of a long flat piece of bamboo shaped not unlike an arrow, pushes bamboo and rush into the space between the cross strings and, quickly withdrawing the bamboo,

leaves the rush, which the man at the loom pushes into place with the bar, which thus acts as a weaver's reed. When the bar is down, the latter twists the projecting end of the rush round and between two stouter pieces of string, a continuation of the web on each side, and makes a knot which keeps the rush in position, and at the same time binds the edge of the mat. The knot is made at each side alternately by the man feeding the rushes and the man driving them home, so that each rush is tied on one edge only. The knot completed, the bar is again raised and pushed over or depressed as the case may be, opening another space below but with reversed strings. Another rush is fed, and so the weaving goes on with great rapidity. The bamboo represents the shuttle in cloth or silk weaving. When the mat is of the necessary length, the edges are trimmed by knife. These mats, which are used as sleeping mats in hot weather, cost from 100 to 400 cash each, according to size. The rushes of which these Hsü-chou Fu mats are made contain the pith, whereas higher up the Min at Chia-ting Fu and Mei Chou the pith or wick, which is used in oil lamps, is first extracted by drawing each rush through a couple of short bamboos tied together, with a knife point projecting from the fork half an inch below their flexible tops. The rushes are steeped in cold water for half an hour, and each rush is then impaled on the knife point a couple of inches from its butt with the back of the knife facing the tip of the rush to prevent the pith from being cut, and the workman, pressing lightly the two projecting bamboo tops with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, pulls the rush by the butt end with his right until within an inch or two of its tip. The pith is then pushed out and readily dislodged, and the rush is cut

into two except two inches at each end. These slit rushes are afterwards spread out in the sun and, when dry, are ready to be woven into mats in the manner above described. A workman will treat 10 catties ($13\frac{1}{3}$ lb.) of rushes in a day and extract $1\frac{1}{2}$ catties (2 lb.) of pith or wick worth 320 cash or about 10d. a catty ($1\frac{1}{3}$ lb.). This rush, which is carefully cultivated, is a source of considerable profit to the farmer. In the beginning of July the crop has attained a height of five or six feet. It is then cut down by reaping-hook, and, if it is desired to extend the cultivation, the roots are taken up a month after harvest, well washed, roughly subdivided and planted out in land prepared as if for the reception of padi-shoots, for a continuous water supply is essential to the production of a good crop. At the time of transplanting, the green tops are carefully cut off. They remain in the ground until November when they are again taken up, washed, subdivided and replanted. In March and May of the following year they are heavily manured and in July the rushes are ripe for the sickle. An English acre has been known to yield about eleven tons of rushes, worth about £3 15s. a ton; but the average crop may be placed at half that quantity. Mats are also manufactured in the same manner from the three-sided rush known as *Scirpus lacustris*, which is also cultivated in Szechuan; but large quantities of this rush are used by shopkeepers in place of string. The *Scirpus* yields two crops of rushes a year, in July and October.

As soon as we had moored off the east gate of Hsü-chou Fu I entered the city to arrange for transport to Yünnan Fu, the capital of the province of Yünnan, a 24 days' journey by way of the prefectural cities of Chao-t'ung Fu and Tung-ch'uan Fu. I selected this route because on

a previous journey through Yünnan I had noticed that the poppy was a prominent crop in these two prefectures, and especially in the plain in which the city of Chao-t'ung Fu lies. I was successful in engaging a caravan at the rate of 6 taels per man for the journey, to be paid in Szechuan dollars at the rate of $\$1 = 0.7$ tael, instead of its face value of 0.72 tael, and its actual market value of 0.71 tael in the province of origin—another example of China's currency iniquities. In the city I found that raw opium could be purchased for 1200 cash, and prepared opium for 1600 cash, a Chinese ounce or $1\frac{1}{3}$ oz. English. In Chengtu the prices were 1400 to 1500 for raw, running up to 2000 cash for the prepared drug. These were in both cases about six times the prices that ruled before suppressive measures were introduced.

The first stage with new transport is usually a short one, for, owing to the weighing of loads, the start is late and it takes bearers and porters some time to get into stride. Moreover, it rained off and on during the 15th March, and there was some doubt whether we should be able to start at all. I had entered into the usual written contract that the men should not be called upon to travel in rain, wind or snow, that is, should they be heavy enough to impede progress. Szechuan may, on the whole, be described as a windless province, and snow is rarely met with except in the mountains to the east and west, where I have often marched through snow without any objection being raised by my followers. But rain is the greatest enemy: it makes the roads slippery and bad going, and it drenches to the skin the ill-clad porters in spite of the large bamboo hats which those who can afford them wear. A man who carries his whole wardrobe on his back can hardly

be blamed if he contracts himself against rain as much as he can. Ascending the right bank of the Min we passed westward through the city of Hsü-chou Fu with its evil smells, and, after a slight descent, struck west by south up the valley of the Yangtsze, the road running about a quarter to half a mile from the left bank of the river through well-cultivated country sloping gently into the bottom of the valley from a low range of terraced but scantily wooded hills to the north with an east and west trend. There is a similar range on the right bank of the Yangtsze with cultivated ground between the water's edge and the range. For a distance of six miles the valley is of no great width ; but later the northern range of hills recedes, leaving a large plain stretching northwards from the river's left bank. Where the valley is narrow there is little depth of soil on the underlying sandstone, yet the crops of wheat and rape looked very promising. Broad beans and peas in flower were mostly confined to the edges of fields, especially padi plots, which were numerous owing to an abundant supply of water from half a dozen streamlets from the northern range to the Yangtsze between Hsü-chou Fu and the market-town of Pai-shu-ch'i, the end of the day's stage of thirteen miles. To the east of Pai-shu-ch'i much of the land had been under sugar-cane ; but the harvest was now over and in many fields the land had been ploughed and planted with tobacco, the leaves of which were already six to nine inches long—a contrast to the seedlings we had seen to the east of the Min. In other fields the roots of the canes were being plucked up preparatory to ploughing and tobacco planting. There were also many fields of rushes (*Juncus effusus*) a couple of feet high, growing, padi like, in standing water. Neither the hills nor the valley were well-wooded ; but the