



Following the Tracks of Ennin's 9th c. Journey

Diary of a Japanese Monk Revived in Today's China



Virginia Stibbs Anami

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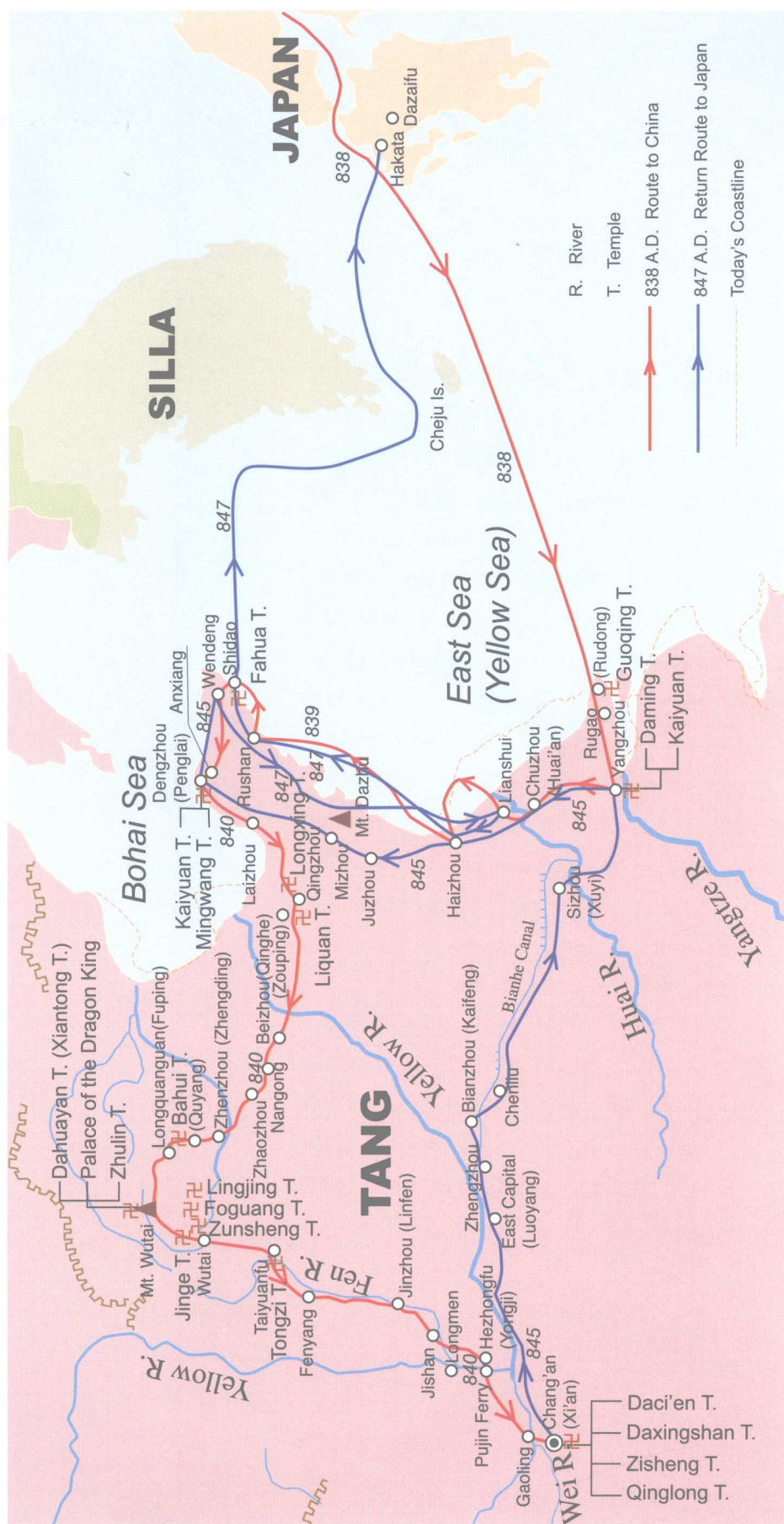
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ROUTE OF ENNIN'S TRAVELS IN CHINA

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*Diary of a Japanese Monk Revived
in Today's China*

Text and Photos: Virginia Stibbs Anami





Contents



Foreword 5

Introduction 7

1. Ennin and Official Mission Arrive in China 13
 2. Ennin's Stay in Yangzhou 19
 3. Traveling by Barge to Chuzhou 25
4. Crossing the Yellow Sea: Haizhou to Mt. Ru 31
 5. Ennin Protected and Advised by Koreans at Mt. Chi 35
 6. Ennin Seeks Travel Permission in Penglai 41
7. Monks Welcomed in Qingzhou 53
 8. Pilgrim's Tracks via Liquan over the Yellow River 61
 9. Along Tang Roads, Nangong to Quyang 69
10. Crossing the Taihang Mountains 75
 11. Ancient Tracks and Cloisters 81
 12. Ennin in Mt. Wutai #1: Zhulin Temple 91
13. Ennin in Mt. Wutai #2: Meeting with Senior Monks 97
 14. Ennin in Mt. Wutai #3: To the Five Terraces 105
 15. Ennin's Departure from Mt. Wutai 115
16. Ennin's Way to Taiyuan 123
 17. Ennin in Taiyuan for All Souls' Festival 133
 18. Ennin's Travels along the Fen River 141
19. Ennin at Chang'an #1: Study of Texts and Ceremonies 153
 20. Ennin at Chang'an #2: Religious Ceremonies in a Cosmopolitan City 159
 21. Ennin at Chang'an #3: Persecution of Buddhism 167
22. Ennin Flees From Persecution 173
 23. Ennin Searches for a Ship Home 181
 24. Ennin's Return to Japan 189

Epilogue 203

Post Script 208

Acknowledgements 211

Books Consulted 213



Dedicated to my husband, Koreshige Anami



Foreword

Virginia Anami's Exploring Footsteps

When I first read Ennin's dairy, I was impressed with the monk's determination to seek out Buddhist teachings, his curiosity about the world around him and his strength to walk almost 40 kilometers a day. He recorded even the smallest detail and they have become valuable clues for us today to understand life in Tang Dynasty China. Now, 1,200 years later, someone has followed along Ennin's footsteps. The fact that this person is an American-born woman, Virginia Anami, has truly surprised me. Actually, I have worked with her on two books, translating them into Japanese. The early one was entitled *Encounters with Ancient Beijing: Its Legacy in Trees, Stone and Water*. What impressed me about her work was her insistence on doing her research on site; that is, searching out people and interviewing them or checking out historical places with her own eyes. Her determination and hands-on approach shows that she and Ennin have something in common.

I also took part in the mini-mission trip of spring, 2007, that she led to imitate the official embassies to Tang China. I followed Virginia

as she had us investigate one part of Ennin's route. Actually it was a strange trip. For example, in Rugao, Jiangsu, after eight o'clock at night we were walking along a simple, narrow alley and I wondered what we were doing here. "This is where Ennin approached on a small skiff," announced a local historian. It was dark and we could hardly see anything. This was our first day after arriving and most of us were tired. Yet Virginia was bright-eyed and excitedly saw through the black night the vision of history.

It was the same in Yangzhou City. There, relics of the Tang Dynasty City Walls are now covered in tea plants. Our local guide was merely walking us along the street below, when Virginia broke rank and made a beeline through the bushes up the hill. I followed her lead. At the top, she announced, "You are standing on the Tang Walls!" and I felt as she indeed had Ennin's spirit in her. Her eyes didn't see tea plants, but the form of the ancient walls as they stood in their prime. I suddenly realized her action mode and content of this book. Virginia-san is guided by an inner force of Ennin and follows those footsteps. I sensed she is kind



of enveloped in the aura of Ennin's persona.

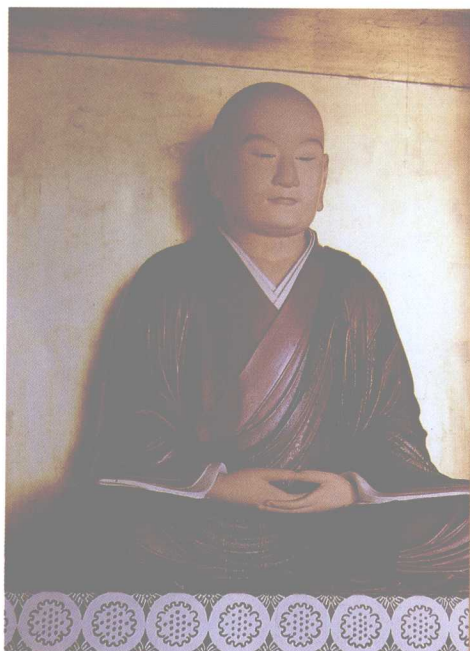
Virginia is exceptional for completing all the "lines" of Ennin's journey. Even though I only took part in the short portions of Rugao and Yangzhou areas, I know that means going to every small hamlet and along every rural path. But without Ennin's spirit there is no meaning to this line. As she went along this route, Virginia photographed what she felt Ennin saw, to give his message to those of use living in the 21st century. Whether this is Ennin's message or Virginia's message, sometimes it is not clear, as

they seem to merge into one.

When Ennin resided in the capital Chang'an there was a mingling of people's that overcame nationality and race. Except for the brief anti-Buddhist purge, the city had an open society. The passageways where the Japanese distinguished monk walked 1,200 years ago have been brought to life again by this energetic woman. I hope that this story can be introduced widely to people of many backgrounds and countries.

Haruko Koike
July 2007





Introduction



STATUE OF JIGAKU DAISHI, MONK ENNIN (794–864)

This statue was carved in 1684 and is honored at Mibu Temple in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan. Ennin was born into the Mibu family of Tsuga District within Shimotsuke Province, the old name for that area.

This is the story of Japanese monk Ennin who in 838 A.D. crossed the ocean from Japan to Tang (618–907) China as a member of an ambassadorial mission. Ennin made this challenging voyage at the age of 45*, as an already distinguished senior monk. During his quest for Buddhist teachings, he wrote *The Record of a Pilgrimage to Tang China in Search of the Law*, one of the great travel diaries of the world, documenting his nine-year sojourn, 838–847. This precious diary was compiled in four scrolls of 70, 000 Chinese characters.

Other journals, such as Chinese monk Xuanzang's 7th century

Record of the Western Regions of his journey to India and Marco Polo's *Description of the World* from the 13th century, are well known travelogues. But Ennin's diary deserves more credit. While Marco Polo was illiterate, Ennin wrote in classical Chinese. Xuanzang also dictated much of his diary to disciples back in China. Ennin, however, kept an almost daily log throughout his expedition. The wonderful details he recorded form a quilt of life of the Tang Dynasty.

Ennin walked through what are today's Jiangsu, Shandong, Hebei, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan and Anhui provinces, averaging about 32 km a day, but even doing an



amazing 46 km on one daunting trek. This chronicle also gives a unique perspective concerning the government organization and vigorous culture of the Tang Empire. Moreover, he gave realistic accounts of the life of common people, something that is missing in usual dynastic histories. He also bore witness to the cruel suppression of Buddhism 842–845 and provides us with valuable descriptions of those tragic events.

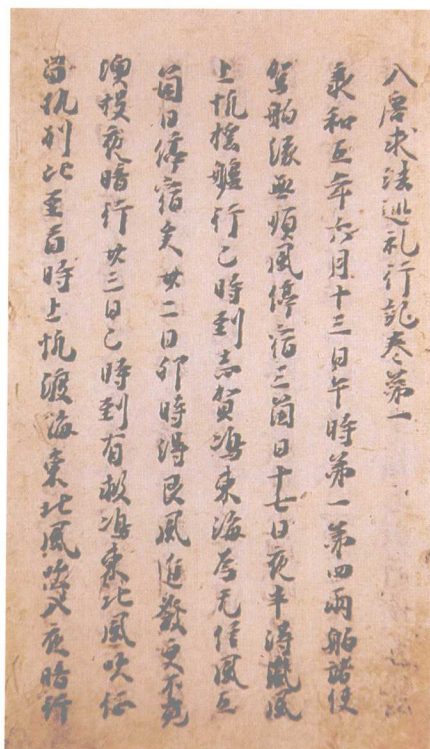
The imperial court of Japan sponsored these missions sending officials, monks, scholars and artisans to learn the advanced culture of China. The first of these official missions was dispatched in 607, a delegation to the Sui (581–618) Dynasty court with the envoy Ono no Imoko as the ambassador. At that time Japan had good relations with the Kingdom of Paekche on the Korean peninsula, therefore Japanese ships safely skirted the peninsula and followed the island chain to the Shandong peninsula of China. However, the new Kingdom of Silla that unified the Korean peninsula in 660 was not on good terms with Japan. Subsequent missions thus sailed the hazardous open sea toward Yangzhou or Ningbo in the south. This made the voyage more dangerous than before. Disasters at sea were numerous, around one fourth of

the persons on board and several ambassadors never returned home.

The frequency of these missions was erratic. Sometimes a lapse of twenty years occurred between trips. Ennin accompanied the mission of 838, which turned out to be the last of these official ambassadorial voyages. The challenges of the journey, burden of high expenses and uncertainty of the political situation in Tang toward the end of the 9th century are cited as reasons for the termination of subsequent visits. Thus, Ennin's account is a rare historical document of the early stage of Japan-China relations.

Tang, at its prime, was an exciting cosmopolitan society and many nationalities were welcome. Ennin was warmly accepted in Buddhist circles as a fellow monk and scholar. While in Yangzhou he mentioned Persians and people from the kingdom of Champa (Vietnam) having given donations to help repair a Yangzhou temple. During his five years in the capital Chang'an (today's Xi'an), Ennin had Sanskrit lessons from Indian monks. He, moreover, received the hospitality and essential assistance from Koreans who had settled in the coastal towns. In his diary he refers to them as people of Silla, the kingdom on the Korean peninsula at that time. Not only monks, but





**THE RECORD OF A PILGRIMAGE TO
TANG CHINA IN SEARCH OF THE LAW,
DIARY OF MONK ENNIN**

Ennin's four scrolls recording his nine-year sojourn from 838 until 847 A.D. have survived in two later copies. The oldest was kept at the Tōji Temple in Kyoto and is now in a private collection. *This photo shows the first few lines of the diary.*

*(Tochigi Prefectural Museum replica,
manuscript in private collection.)*

also Silla local officials, translators, tradesmen and sailors were of great help. Ennin was indebted to Koreans again at the end of his stay, because it was a Korean ship that finally brought him home safely.

The pull of learning at Chinese monasteries in various locations made the sea voyage essential for senior Japanese monks to study in depth Buddhist scripture and practice from the great masters. It is obvious from Ennin's writings that he, moreover, had a passionate conviction in his search for a deeper understanding of his faith. Although Ennin emphasized the factual, occasionally in his writings emotions showed through. His spirituality is very open throughout the diary. In a forthright manner he made note of his dreams and prayers.

Ennin obviously expected to follow the footsteps of his mentor, Saicho, founder of the Tendai Sect in Japan, and study Tendai philosophy at monasteries at Mt. Tiantai in South China. Ennin had the added responsibility of finding answers to specific questions from his temple in Japan concerning Tendai doctrines and practices. However, his designation as a Scholar Monk rather than Student Monk restricted permission by the Tang authority for an extended stay of study. Tang had the custom

of giving full scholarships for foreigners undertaking long periods of study. So the reasons for denying permission were probably economic. Instead of returning home with his official delegation, however, Ennin spent close to one and a half years dealing with the bureaucracy in order to obtain formal papers to travel in the country.

There is no question that Ennin's religious studies, particularly esoteric Buddhism, at monasteries in Mt. Wutai and Chang'an had a very important impact on the later development of Buddhism in Japan. After he returned, he became the head abbot of the famous Enryakuji Monastery outside of Kyoto on Mt. Hiei and wielded a lot of influence not only in circles of Japanese Buddhism, but with the imperial court as well. After his death at the age of 71*, he was given the honorary posthumous title of Jikaku Daishi. Unfortunately, Ennin's diary has gone almost unnoticed.

The Record of a Pilgrimage to Tang China in Search of the Law has survived the ages through a couple of copied manuscripts and its inclusion in the published collection containing all Japan's Buddhist works. Early research by Okada Masayuki and his reproduction of the diary in 1926 allowed for





its utilization among a more widespread group of scholars. But it was Professor Edwin Reischauer of Harvard University, who in the 1950s, translated Ennin's diary from Classical Chinese into English and also wrote a compendium volume that brought this important document to the attention of the world. Subsequent translations and commentaries by scholars into modern vernacular Japanese have made the diary more accessible to the public.

I first learned about Ennin and his sojourn in China in the 1960s at

university when I studied Buddhist history and historical geography. It intrigued me that this journal had survived since the 9th century. I still remember the first time I glanced at the stylized map inside the book's dust jacket. Place names like Chang'an, Mt. Wutai and Yangzhou greeted me for the first time. There was an almost immediate lure to follow his experience.

Years later when I actually met Professor Reischauer, he seemed to have put Ennin into his own past. He had been given the idea to research this archaic work by his

JAPANESE SHIPS BOUND FOR TANG CHINA

Ennin sailed with the ambassadorial mission to China in 838. After several abortive starts, their original fleet of four ships was reduced to three, each carrying around 150 persons. In addition to officials, scholars, artists, translators, doctors, monks and Shinto priests, half of those on board were classified as sailors. These ships left from Naniwa port (near today's Osaka), passed through the Inland Sea and the Straits of Shimonoseki to Hakata Bay in Kyushu, then touched the Gotō Archipelago and finally headed across the open sea.

(Painting published in China National Geography, Oct. 2003)





professor at the Sorbonne in Paris and completed the methodical translation back at Harvard. When I inquired about where one might get a copy of his book, he just modestly remarked, "Oh, I don't think that anyone is interested in that quaint story anymore." But his response only served to pique my curiosity. Yet it wasn't until I lived in China from the early 1980s that I began to explore Ennin's actual paths.

I was eager to visit some of the places where he had walked twelve centuries before. Although at that time there were still travel restrictions for foreigners, I was able to visit those places that had initially caught my eye on Ennin's travel map: Chang'an (Xi'an), Mt. Wutai and Yangzhou. Later postings in Beijing coincided with the gradual opening up of China, allowing for access to more regions of Ennin's route. This was important for understanding the bulk of the diary that describes his journey through rural areas.

Finding these exact same sites today has often been like detective work. Fortunately, many geographical features and villages have kept their names, so I could pinpoint his daily positions on ancient and modern maps. Not only that, reading his descriptions of places you can see the same view, touch the same rocks, stand at the

same junctures, and walk the same walk. Canals that he used are still navigable. One can cross passes, rivers and bridges at the same place today. These experiences help peel back history and make such ancient writings really come alive.

Someone once asked me if I ever felt any danger during these travels. The answer was: never. Only the fierce wind of the Western Terrace of Mt. Wutai gave resistance. A heavy fog as I rode in a skiff along the China coast may have been risky, however it coincided with the precarious sea voyage Ennin had at the same spot. Admittedly, I did have some nervousness when trying to get permission for some photographs. Actually, I felt that Ennin was frequently there in spirit to help facilitate this work. Sometimes it also went the other way, in the form of challenges I had to face. For example, on one blistering hot day I climbed a mountain with much effort, only to find several cars parked at the top. It seems that my ignorance of a mountain road forced me to endure the hardships of the old-time pilgrim.

This book is intended to bring the reader along Ennin's trail in today's China. As I pieced together his path over the past twenty-five years, it turned out that I was on the one hand searching for Ennin's story,



yet at the same time discovering a cross-section of life from my own encounters. As Ennin had done, I also took time to talk to local people. For that reason I have included photographs of persons who represent my impressions of this contemporary scene.

Through Ennin's saga, we get an insight into a man of enormous fortitude. He put much emphasis on walking as a spiritual exercise to understand the essence of this world. Please join in his journey and see and feel what Ennin experienced 1,200 years ago.

Ennin's story in China can be divided into four major themes: Arrival and Seeking Permission

to Stay, Pilgrimage Travels to Mt. Wutai, Study Period in Capital Chang'an, and Escape from Persecution and Return Home.

Dates used by Ennin are based on the lunar calendar and reign years of Japanese and Chinese emperors. As many dates are part of quotations, citations of lunar days and months have been kept, but reign years have been supplanted by modern year calculations. This book often gives place names with both their Tang and present designations.

*Japanese age reckoning traditionally adds one year at birth.





Ennin and Official Mission Arrive in China

838.6.23~

Three ships of the ambassadorial mission set off from the shore of a Japanese coastal island at 6 p.m. on the 23rd day of the Sixth Moon (lunar month) of 838. Ambassador Fujiwara Tsunetsugu, a scholar of Chinese literature, rode on the first ship, while Ennin and his disciples were on another. It took them eight days to reach the coast near Rudong Town in today's Jiangsu Province. In those times all ship captains were told to head for Rudong because one could then travel by canals to the cosmopolitan metropolis of Yangzhou.

Their boats, though, had a rough arrival. They smashed on a shoal, sunk into deep mudflats and broke apart. Those on board were despondent. A small ship came to Ennin's rescue, but most members of the expedition had to clamber ashore through soggy marshlands. Fortunately, locals guided them to nearby narrow inter-coastal canals. Several skiffs, piled up with their tribute goods, bore them inland. Along the way they

met officials from a regional salt bureau checking canal traffic. They conversed by brush and learned of their whereabouts.

The delegation's first night on Chinese soil was the 1st day of the Seventh Moon. Needing some time to recuperate and waiting for an official reception at Yangzhou to be arranged, Ennin's group rested for two weeks at a small monastery, while the ambassador's entourage stayed at Rudong's Guoqing Temple. One monk welcomed them with peaches, but heavy rains and the scourge of mosquitoes left them all a bit depressed. According to Ennin's diary the mosquitoes were terrible pests: *"They are as large as flies. When night comes they torment the men who suffer limitlessly."*

When the mission finally got underway again, they moved inland along the main canal, dug in the Sui Dynasty, with a fleet of about forty barges tied together and pulled by water buffalo, plying narrow paths along the banks. Stopping for tea at Rugao Town,





Ennin described the willow-lined waterway as having fine homes on either side. Ennin was amazed at the floating trains of salt-laden barges, writing: "...with three or four, or again four or five boats bound side by side and in line, followed one after the other without a break for several tens of li. (Li, traditional Chinese measure, is about 550 meters.) *This unexpected sight is not easy to record.*"

The official mission made slow progress because many men were suffering from dysentery. As they neared the prefectural capital of Yangzhou on the 25th, Ennin entered in his diary that "*the river was full of large boats, boats laden with reeds and small boats, too numerous to*

be counted." They stopped outside the city's eastern wall.

These notations are some of his first observations after setting foot in Tang China. Reading them today and trying to follow the route of Ennin and his party makes for an interesting adventure in time and space. I tried to find images that made some connection with the past. He was alert to everything, even mentioning flora and fauna. His observations made me look all the more closely at the surroundings and where possible I tried to emulate his journey either by foot or barge. It is a good way to get familiar with today's China.

SHELL GATHERERS RETURNING FROM A DAY'S WORK, JIANGSU

It was probably in the vicinity of today's Bingfang Coastline that Ennin's ship crashed ashore on the muddy flats that appear to stretch forever along the horizon. Today's coast, however, has been extended over 15 km by the build-up of silt since Ennin arrived. I went looking for the sea, but I finally had to ask some passing shell gatherers, jammed into a tractor-lorry, where the water was. According to my modern map, the legal shoreline was far behind. They laughed and replied, "Right here, tide's out." Ennin's group must have endured great hardships just to get to safety.

