ANNUAL CUSTOMS AND FESTIVALS IN PEKING

as recorded in the *Yen-ching Sui-shih-chi* by

TUN LI-CH'EN

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED BY

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FULLY ILLUSTRATED

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INTRODUCTION

THIS little book is a translation from the Chinese of the *Yen-ching Sui-shih-chi* 燕京歲時記, a title which literally means "Record of a Year's Time at Yen Ching," Yen Ching being an ancient name for Peking. It is a record, day by day, and month by month, beginning with Chinese New Year's Day and taking us throughout the year, of what used to take place in Peking : its festivals, temple pilgrimages, fairs, customs, and the clothing, foods, and animals of the season. Many of these, of course, were peculiar to Peking, but many others were and still are widespread in China, and will have general interest, it is hoped, to all those who wish to study the popular and everyday expressions of thought of the Chinese.

The postscript of the book (see p. 105) bears a date corresponding to April 15, 1900, and though a later date of December 3, 1901, appears in the text on p. 20, it is evident that this is a supplementary note added by the author after the book as a whole had been written. This fact, and the fact that the book is written by a Manchu, have for us a special significance. They mean that in it are recorded many Manchu customs and many ceremonies of the Imperial Court which of course have utterly vanished to-day, and that the picture it gives us is that of the prosperous Peking of olden days before the great changes wrought by the disastrous Boxer Rebellion of 1900. But at the same time the work is modern enough, so that probably the greater part of what it describes is still applicable to what happens in Peking to-day.

Who was the author of this book? From its original preface, together with a brief biography appearing in the *Tzŭ-t'eng-kuan Shih-ts'ao* 紫藤館詩草, a memorial volume of his poems published after his death, we can obtain considerable information concerning his life. He belonged, as the introduction tells us, to a noble Manchu family, holding the hereditary title of Earl of Tun Hui, and his ancestors came originally from Ch'ang Pai 長白 in the province of Kirin in Manchuria. The name of his clan was Fu-ch'a 富察, his own name was Tun-ch'ung 敦崇, and his fancy name or pseudonym was Li-ch'en 禮臣. But in accordance with the usual Manchu custom, he dropped the clan name of Fu-ch'a, and gave his name a Chinese form by calling himself Tun Li-ch'en.

Li-ch'en was born in 1855, so that he was already about forty-five years old when he wrote the present work. In 1875 he wished to take the government examination, success in which would ultimately have given him official position. But because one of his relatives was a member of the examining board, he was forced to withdraw in accordance with the usual Chinese practice, which forbade a man under such circumstances from taking the examinations, for fear that there might be unfair favoritism. This occurred to him no less than three times, until "he became oppressed and dejected, and having no alternative, entered office by means of payment." This practice of buying an office instead of obtaining it legitimately by passing the examinations, had long existed on a very small scale in China, but had not reached sizeable proportions until the late Manchu dynasty, beginning to feel the want of funds, had sanctioned it by Imperial Decree in 1850.

Li-ch'en thus became a petty clerk in the Ministry of War, from which he was promoted to be a Departmental Director, and later was sent to Kuangsi to be Prefect of the Ssŭ-en 思恩 Department. Before he had arrived at his post, however, he was sent on the recommendation of the Viceroy, Hsi Liang 錫良, to be an Intendant in Manchuria. The biography says no more of his official career, but states that in the seventh month of the third year of Hsüan T'ung (August 24 to September 21, 1911) he fell ill, and died soon after returning to Peking, at the age of fifty-seven. His death was thus almost coincident with the outbreak of the Chinese Revolution on October 10, 1911, which was to overthrow so much which had been dear to him.

Before his death, however, Li-ch'en had succeeded in fulfilling the hope expressed in the preface to the present book, that he would "still further develop this ability, and compose other works, for the glory of those who have studied with him." Thus his biography lists no less than ten other works from his pen, in addition to the book here translated, and the book of poems in which the biography itself appears. These include an historical work on the *Tso Chuan*, and other books of essays, poems, and notes on Peking, etc., but all of rather a trifling nature, so that there is no doubt that it is for the present work that he will be best remembered.

From his own writing, however, considerably more can be gleaned concerning Li-ch'en's character. Indeed, the reader of this translation will probably find it of considerable interest for the insight it gives into the Chinese thought and psychology of its author, as well as for the actual information

it gives about Chinese life and customs as a whole. For Li-ch'en is essentially Chinese in his outlook, notwithstanding that in two places (pp. 6 and 59), he betrays rather unnecessarily his Manchu origin by contrasting in a naïve manner the "august frugality" of his own dynasty with the wasteful or "childish" luxuriousness of former dynasties.

In a number of places he attains to passages of real lyric beauty which show in a fine way Chinese human sympathy and feeling for nature. Sometimes he displays the typical, and what may seem to us exaggerated, Chinese moral sense, as when he condemns itinerant player societies or the story-teller, for their trouble-making proclivities (pp. 46 and 97). And at least once his style betrays the Chinese love for literary exaggeration, as when on p. 56 he describes "ponds of lotus whose fragrance may be smelled for several *li*." Anyone acquainted with the lotus will know that, regardless of its other charms, a strong fragrance is certainly not one of its characteristics.

Li-ch'en also displays a sensitive appreciation for the niceties of life, such as one might expect in a person accustomed to luxury, yet which is characteristic, to a considerable degree, of the Chinese people as a whole. Thus it would be hard to find any European or American gentleman, not himself a special breeder of pigeons, who could recite the long list of varieties of pigeons given by our author on pp. 21-22; and still harder to find any European or American who could write down the list of varieties of chrysanthemums (even if the names are poetical rather than ones actually used), given on pp. 71-73, of which our author says in conclusion: "This makes a total of one hundred and thirty-three kinds, all of which I remember. But for those who can think of them, there are still more than two hundred other kinds. . . . . "

Yet Li-ch'en was more than a mere æsthete. In his section on crickets (p. 82) he speaks of the inordinate craze for elaborate cricket cages as one of the causes leading to the impoverishment of so many of Peking's nobles. And in his section on the "pacing-horse" lantern (pp. 80-81), one of the most interesting in the book, with its ingenious analogy of the Chinese concept of history to a children's toy, he shows a keen awareness of the problems of the unscientific and non-industrialized China of his time, facing an industrialized West, and attacks whole-heartedly China's self-complacency. Again, on p. 19, he mentions the fact that he has read western books on agriculture. There is one other reference on p. 18 to the West, by the way, in which he makes the interesting statement that already in his time "as to old porcelain, it is extremely scarce, for much of it has already been bought and taken away by foreigners."

Yet why, it may still be asked, should such a book as this be translated, when there are already books by westerners on the subject? The answer is that it is valuable because it gives an account, in a concise and straightforward manner, of Chinese life and customs as a Chinese himself would look at them. It avoids those two besetting sins of foreign books on the subject: either a tendency to sentimentalize in a way which is western rather than Chinese, and which tends to throw a wrong coloring on what is described; or to compile a bulky disquisition so learned and profound as to repel the average reader. At the same time it is valuable because it gives a large amount of information, culled from earlier Chinese sources, describing the origins of various festivals and antiquities.

There is one rather striking feature of our book, which is that within its pages the name of Confucius is not once directly mentioned; only on p. 10 is he incidentally referred to as "The Sage," in a literary quotation. This fact is significant and important as indicating that Confucianism, regardless of the part it has played in molding the thought and morality of China's ruling and educated classes, has after all had comparatively little impact on the ideology of her common people, to such extent, at least, as this has become concretely manifested in customs and festivals. Buddhism has played a greater part, though here too we find only three customs which are specifically Buddhist: the distribution of beans on the eighth day of the fourth month; All Souls' Day on the fifteenth of the seventh month; and the *la pa* gruel offerings on the eighth day of the twelfth month. And even here, these last two probably go back to pre-Buddhist origins.

Taoism, in its religious rather than philosophical aspects, with its many temples dedicated to the God of T'ai Shan, and his daughter, the Princess of the Colored Clouds, has been of greater importance. Yet we must go beyond these organized religions, to the cult of the local or historical deities such as the God of War or the City Gods; to that of the tutelary deities, such as the God of the Kitchen, long preceding either Taoism or Buddhism; and above all to the form in which Chinese religious feeling has most beautifully expressed itself — that of the worship of ancestors — to reach the true heart of the common people.

What will perhaps most strike the reader is to observe how closely so many of the festivals are associated with nature. These begin in the first month with the worship of stars and the Lantern Festival, and continue in early

spring with the *Ch'ing Ming* festival, which takes the people out into the countryside to the graves of their ancestors. And just as in Chaucer's England

> Whan that Aprille with his shoures soote
> The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
> . . . . . .
> Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,

so in China the third and fourth months are times when pilgrimages are made to many temples lying amidst the most beautiful natural surroundings; and made with the same joy and gaiety which characterized the Canterbury Pilgrims. Several other festivals are likewise intimately associated with the forces of nature, and it is interesting to note that no less than three of these, the Lantern Festival, All Souls' Day, and the Moon Festival, come at the time of, and are closely connected with, the full moon.

There is a great deal here that is beautiful and worthy of our admiration, and only a little (perhaps only the account on p. 46 of the penances performed during the tour made by the God of the City), which is repellent. Indeed, what the translator has felt most strongly in making this translation, and what he hopes his readers will feel, is the sentiment here indirectly expressed of the essential oneness and harmony of man with the universe. It is a sentiment which permeates much of the greatest Chinese art and poetry, for in the Chinese, as perhaps in no other people, has been developed a keen consciousness and awareness of the movement and rhythm of nature, as evidenced in the yearly rotation of the seasons. It is an awareness which has made them deliberately subordinate their own activities to that of the forces of nature, so that as we read this book, we find such things as their foods, the clothes which they put on, and the lighting and taking away of their winter fires, all following in their times a course as rigid as that of the birds in their seasonal migrations.

Perhaps it is this subordination of man's will which has prevented China from achieving a science, for science is born from the struggle against, rather than the submission to, natural forces. But in its place it has given a spiritual calm which has carried the Chinese unshaken through the severest trials, and if some realization of this fact can herein be conveyed to western readers, this book will not have failed to do its bit to help in the understanding of the heart of a great people.

To-day, with the advent of industrialism, and the accompanying influx of standardized ways of life, this consciousness of nature tends to die, together with the beautiful customs it has engendered. It is left for the reader to judge who is the gainer and who the loser.

A few words as to the method of translation may not be out of place here. The edition used has been that of the *Wen Te Chai* 文德齋, published in Peking in 1906. The translator has tried hard to avoid that Scylla and Charybdis of translators of Chinese books: the making of the translation so exact and scientific that the average reader, who knows nothing about Chinese, and who wishes to be entertained as well as informed, will never look at it; and making it so superficial and loose that it will meet only condemnation from the scholar. He hopes that he has succeeded in producing a text smooth enough to please the former, and yet close enough to the original to satisfy the latter. Single words which the author obviously intends, but which the original text omits because they are not required by the exigencies of Chinese style, the translator has not hesitated to add. Anything more elaborate than this, however, such as an interpretation offered by the translator of what the author probably implies but does not directly express, or something supplied to give clarity to the western reader, has been added enclosed in parentheses. Thus everything within parentheses, and all notes, both those embodied in the text, giving general explanations, and the footnotes, dealing with detailed points, are by the translator. The only exception to this are the three or four notes made by the author himself, which are marked *Author's Note*.

Very little of the original text has been left untranslated, save the fairly numerous poems, stone-tablet inscriptions, etc., which it contains, and which were not composed by the author himself, but commonly by Emperors or other persons of high degree. These are usually written in such flowery language that a satisfactory translation of them would be extremely difficult, and would add little to the interest of the book. Aside from these, a few other passages have been omitted, usually those which have only a philological interest, or which discuss places already described in other books on Peking. These omissions are rare, and when more than a few words long, are explained in the footnotes. But if the omission is less than a sentence in length, it is simply indicated in the usual way by a series of periods. . . . . In order not to crowd the text with Chinese characters, an index has been prepared where all the important Chinese names and words will be found.

As to the illustrations, all the wood engravings have been taken from the *Hung-hsüeh Yin-yüan-t'u-chi* 鴻雪因緣圖記, a book in six volumes, the various prefaces to which bear dates ranging from 1839 to 1849. This was also written, fittingly enough, by a Manchu, Lin Ch'ing 麟慶, who for ten

years was a General Inspector of the Imperial Canals, and in this post travelled to many parts of China, making, as he did so, short descriptions of the spots he visited, and illustrations to go with them. Some of his illustrations dealing with Peking appear here. The sketches are by Mr. Fu Shu-ta 傅叔達, of Peiping.

It is a pleasure to acknowledge the help of the many persons who have contributed to this translation. First among them comes Mr. Sun Shih-hsün 孫世訓, a fine old gentleman of the old school, without whose wide knowledge of the Peking of former times, the making of this translation would have been far more difficult. Others to whom deep thanks are due are Professor Chang Hsing-lang 張星烺, Head of the Department of History of the Catholic University, Peiping, for much information on Chinese terms and phrases; Dr. John C. Ferguson, who read the proofs and gave many valuable suggestions; Mr. L. C. Arlington, well-known co-author of *In Search of Old Peking*, for information concerning certain places in Peking; Mr. S. A. Polevoy, translator of a book of Mongol fairy stories into Chinese, for certain Manchu terms; Dean William Hung 洪業, of the Harvard-Yenching Institute at Yenching University, Peiping, for bibliographical information; Mr. Henri Vetch, who did all he could to help the book through the press; Messrs. Chang Ch'un-ling 張春霖, Hu Hsien-hsiu 胡先驌, Li Liang-ch'ing 李良慶, and Shou Chen-huang 壽振璜, of the Fan Memorial Institute of Biology, Peiping, for the western equivalents of certain Chinese names of plants, birds, and fish; and last, but not least, the translator's mother and wife, for reading the manuscript and giving many helpful suggestions.

DERK BODDE

PEIPING, CHINA,
SEPTEMBER 21, 1935.

ORIGINAL PREFACE

My friend, Tun Li-ch'en 敦禮臣, is a member of a noble Manchu family, being a descendent in the eighth generation of the Grand Tutor and Grand Secretary, Duke Wen Mu 文穆公 of the Ma 馬 family. He inherits the title of Earl of Tun Hui 敦惠伯, and is the second son of Ch'eng Chien-t'ang 承簡堂, squire. As boys we were fellow-students, both of us receiving our education from Wu Shao-yün 烏紹雲, President of the Ministry of Works. Li-ch'en was the latter's nephew, so that his is a far-reaching origin indeed. His intelligence surpasses that of other men, while in the practice of the literary arts he is also able to make a good showing, so that his associates have conceded him an ability such as is worthy of being marketed.

At the special examination held through Imperial kindness in the *Yi-hai* year (1875), I and my brother both received the degree of *hsiang chien*,[1] but Li-ch'en, because one of his relatives (was among those in charge of the examinations), had to withdraw, and hence was not allowed even once to offer his "ox cleaver."[2] What a pity indeed! Several times later on he again was forced to withdraw, so that he became oppressed and dejected, and, having no other alternative, entered office by means of payment, something which he had never intended doing.

In the leisure time after meals he continued to amuse himself with books and histories, so that he had a wide knowledge of the origin of many of the antiquities of the present dynasty. Thus one day when I happened to pass his place, I saw on a table his *Yen-ching Sui-shih-chi*, in one volume. I took it up and read it through once, which was enough to show to me his imaginative mind. Although this is not a grand production nor a vast literary work,

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[1] 鄉薦, i.e., the second or *chü jen* 舉人 degree in the government examinations.

[2] This expression has reference to the *Lun Yü* (Confucian Analects), XVII, 4, in which it is said of Confucius: "When the Master came to Wu-ch'eng he heard (everywhere) the sound of string instruments and singing; whereupon he smiled and laughingly said, 'Why use an ox cleaver to kill a chicken?' 'A while ago, Sir,' replied Tzu Lü (a disciple), 'I heard you say: When men of rank have learnt morality they love their fellow-men; and when the common people have learnt morality, they are easily commanded.' 'My disciples!' said the Master, 'Yen's remark is right. What I said before was only in jest.'" Hence the expression here of "ox cleaver" means that Tun Li-ch'en, with his unusual ability (the "ox cleaver"), would have had no difficulty in passing the examination.

it will serve indeed to contribute to investigations made in the future (into the old customs), its purpose thus being the same as that of the (*Ti-ching*) *Ching-wu-lüeh* and the (*Pei-ching*) *Sui-hua-chi*.[1]

But even so, how can the learning of such a man as Li-ch'en stop with this? I hope that he will still further develop this ability, and compose other works, for the glory of those who have studied with him. This indeed is my fervent hope.

This introduction is respectfully presented in the *Chia-p'ing* month of the *Chi-hai* year, twenty-fifth year of Kuang Hsü (January 11 to February 10, 1900), by a stupid elder fellow-student, Jun-fang Shu-t'ien 潤芳澍田, on whom has been conferred the degree of *chin shih*,[2] and who holds the office of Second Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Justice.

The characters have been respectfully written by Ch'ing-chen Po-ju 慶珍博如, a younger male relative through marriage, of the fourth official rank,[3] with the decoration of a peacock feather, and who holds the position of Assistant Director in the Ministry of War.

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[1] For these, and all other books mentioned in the text, see the Bibliography.

[2] 進士, the third degree in the government examinations.

[3] Under the Manchu dynasty there were nine grades of officials, distinguished by the buttons of jade and of other stones put on their Mandarin hats.

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