

The Chinese Wanderlust

TRAVEL with the Chinese is no imported pastime. It has been regarded throughout the ages as one means of education almost sufficient unto itself. In some respects Confucius is one of the greatest travellers China has ever produced. In all his life he journeyed from one principality to another, from one kingdom to another, propagating his doctrines of government, expounding his system of ethics.

After him came Sze-ma Chien, the famous historian whose works are treasured by scholars as classics today as in his time. He is said to have visited all the renowned mountains and gigantic rivers of the country and to have derived infinite inspiration from their natural grandeur.

In subsequent centuries travel never lost its lure for the fortunate and the *litterati*. In poetry and essays bequeathed from one dynasty after another, constant reference is to be witnessed to the beauty spots of old Cathay. Li Po, in one of his celebrated poems, sang loud praise for the Yangtse whose current he described as so swift as to be capable of enabling him to complete a 1000-*li* voyage in a single day!

Religion, too, has furnished a distinct motive for travel. Chinese Buddhists are known to have covered the vast land on foot, to preach the gospels of alien gods. The Omei Mountain in Szechuen has been their Meca for generations. The Five National Mountains of China have also drawn the pious and the *elite* alike to their sacred shrines.

Even filial piety and fidelity have played their rôle in stimulating travel. In Chinese folklore are to be found many stories of devoted sons in search of their missing parents or faithful wives of their wandering husbands. Around the Great Wall, built with human sweat and blood, has been woven many a yarn of the forlorn spouse in pursuit of her beloved.

The hand of Mars has, however, furnished the mightiest factor for travel in the form of migration. In external conquest or in domestic strife, the people of one section were often driven, by ambition or by despair, to another. Thus the vitality of the Chinese population has been enabled to recoup itself as the result of periodical upheavals.

Travel among the Chinese has not been confined to the national boundaries. Chinese Jews have from time to time crossed the ocean to pay homage at the citadel of Christianity. Cantonese and Fukienese traders have scattered all over the globe in anticipation of wealth.

Travel, it would appear clear, has never been dreaded by the Chinese. Although there is a famous saying that "a scholar need not proceed beyond the threshold of his home to know all things of the world," it does not follow that the average Chinese has a natural aversion to travel. The family system has perhaps produced a deterrent effect on the *wanderlust* of the Chinese, but the real difficulty in popularising travel as a form of pleasure has to be attributed to the lack of good means of communication.

The development of railways in China has broken the inertia to a large extent. The advent of the airplane has exerted on the people a psychological effect which has been immediately reflected in the general realisation that the country, large as it is, is after all not inaccessible in a short span of time. It has changed the entire conception of the people toward travel. While it was once true that "the road to Szechuen is more difficult than that to heaven," it is literally true now that that difficult road has become a mere speck from the porthole of an airplane scaling the clouds above.

Contributing toward the new desire of travel which has caught the Chinese everywhere are the frequent world tours which have brought into close contact peoples from all parts of the earth. It cannot but dawn upon even the most conservative Chinese that, if their fatherland is worth journeying to see over thousands of miles of water, land and air, certainly they can afford to enjoy its sights at much less expenditure of time and money.

With the ground steadily prepared, the tourist agencies have lost no time to encourage travel and reap more profits. Among them must be mentioned the China Travel Service, the pioneer Chinese company of its kind. Through its aggressive management excursions have been conducted first to Hangchow, then to Tsingtao, then to Pootoo and now even to such a far-away city as Moscow or as close a resort as Kaochiao.

The China Travel Service has not only induced people to travel but has also tried to make travel both inexpensive and comfortable. In the interior it has opened comfort stations along motor roads and railways. In Nanking as well as in the distant metropolitan centers it has built hotels of its own, some on an equal footing with the best in the world and some in conformity with the modest demands of their locality.

In the China Travel Service is embodied the Chinese spirit of progressive management. At its head are placed men of vision and conviction. In its early days it could not even obtain satisfactory accommodations for its clients from the foreign steamship companies, determined as they were to discriminate against it in favor of their national enterprises. Service, and nothing else, has overcome the natural antipathy, and today foreigners are found among its most valued patrons.

In modern China the ancient *wanderlust* has received fresh impetus. With the growth of motor highways, railway communications and aviation facilities on the one hand, and with the birth of new inland cities on the other, the country will quickly emerge into closer proximity in spite of the age-old natural barriers. With closer proximity will disappear difficulties of dialects and in their place will arise a sense of national unity yet unseen. The benefits of travel are untold, and so this number is dedicated to this beneficent diversion of mankind.