Foochow and the River Min.

By Myron C. Wilcox, Ph.D.

Once upon a time a missionary, just home from Ceylon, had the honour of being introduced to an audience in about these words: “He who is to address us this evening comes from the land where every prospect pleases, but only man is vile; you will now have the pleasure of listening to him.” Whether he made an ad hominem application of these complimentary remarks to himself is not stated, but I want to say something about a region to which these lines from Bishop Heber certainly apply, and about a city which Ibn Batatu, the celebrated Arabian traveller, described in the middle of the fourteenth century as “a large and handsome place situated in a plain and surrounded with gardens something like the plain of Damascus.”

Foochow (氈) is in round numbers four hundred miles from Shanghai and five hundred from Hongkong. It is not only the capital of Fookien Province but the residence of the Viceroy of that province and of its northern neighbour, Chekiang. Fookien has been appropriately called “the Switzerland of China.” Few tourists see this beautiful part of the country on account of the inconvenience of transferring to “coasters” and the infrequency with which steamers of the through lines call at Pagoda Anchorage. But those who do visit this region never forget the Min River, or the charming
scenery that nearly everywhere fringes its banks and extends in either direction as far as the eye can reach. Having ascended this stream for several hundred miles one can bear witness that the scenery grows more and more rugged and sublime the farther one penetrates into the interior by this waterway.

There is evidence that the Arabs—who first came to China in A.D. 678, and are mentioned by Matwanlin as late as A.D. 1265—frequently visited Fookien, but there is reason to believe that they had little, if any, commercial intercourse with Foochow, Chinchew being in early days the chief trading mart of that part of China. At the time of Marco Polo the name Chonka was applied to Fookien by its people, because this province had from 709 to 754 formed a virtually independent kingdom whose capital was Kienchow (州建), the Kiennning (宿建) of to-day. This early kingdom was called Kienkuo, the original undoubtedly of Chonka.

According to M. Pauthier, Foochow, under the Mongols, was the chief town of the circuit of that name—Foochowfu, which was established in 1278. Three years later these conquerors removed the seat of government from Chinchew, where it had long been, to Foochow. In 1282 they transferred it back to Chinchew, but “in 1285,” says M. Pauthier, "it was incorporated with the government of Kiangtsche which had its headquarters at Hangchow,"
In 1273 the office of collector of customs, which had for ages been at Chinchew, was removed to Foochow, to which city the Loochou tribute-bearers were ordered thereafter to take their tribute.

The fact that Bohea, Congou, and other kinds of tea are grown in the region of Foochow and were carried overland to Canton by a difficult route of six hundred miles was, of course, long known to foreign traders. Consequently, in 1830, the East India Company made representations in favour of opening the former place to British trade. Nothing was, however, accomplished until 1842, when the Treaty of Nanking opened the "Five Ports" in which Foochow was included. In June, 1843, Mr. George Tradescant Lay unfurled the British flag over the first consulate established here. It is an interesting fact that his son, Mr. Walter T. Lay, recently served as Commissioner of Customs at this port.

During a number of years after Foochow became accessible to foreigners, commerce was "up-hill business." There was no market for imports; several anti-foreign attacks by the populace rendered the port an unsafe place of residence, and the state of the river was such that vessels—except those of very light draft—were unable to ascend as far as the present foreign settlement. Unfortunately, the natural shallowness of the river in places has been increased through shoaling caused by a barrier, built in 1841, to prevent British warships from reaching the city. Hence tea and other commodities have to be transported by cargo boats to and from Pagoda Anchorage, the
limit of navigation for ocean steamers. As Foochow is difficult of access from the land side, it was entirely unmolested during the Tai'ping rebellion, but in 1865 fears for the safety of the city led the authorities to seek the assistance of British officers for the instruction of a body of troops in the use of foreign arms. An officer and some men were accordingly sent to Foochow, where a camp of instruction was formed and several hundred Tartar soldiers were very creditably drilled.

Let us now imagine ourselves on board a steamer from Shanghai or Hongkong. Soon after passing Matsoo Island, in the former case, or in the latter, the White Dogs—one of which petty islands is marked by a lighthouse—our vessel begins to head for the narrow channel leading into the Min. Before entering the river our steamer may be delayed for hours until the rising tide enables it to cross the bar—a "Heaven-sent institution" in the eyes of the Chinese. Away to our right we can make out Sharp Peak, a small rocky island containing several sanitariums, also a residence and offices of the E. E. A. & C. Telegraph Co. Foochow, it may be here stated, is thirty-four miles from the mouth of the Min and about ten miles above Pagoda Anchorage.

The entrance to the river is bordered on each side by a range of hills whose steep sides are beautifully terraced in the interest of agriculture. This striking feature, which so enhances the beauty of Chinese scenery, is
noticeable not only along the river but wherever hills and mountains exist. Seven or eight miles from its mouth the stream suddenly contracts into what is called Kinpai Pass (牌金), which is formed by rocky walls on either side. The scenery at this point is, however, surpassed by that of Minngan (安閘), farther up the river. Here the towering cliffs, terraced hillsides, and curiously perched fortifications recall to European travellers the mountain defiles of the Rhine.

Four or five miles higher we come to Losing Island (星羅) which is crowned by a small pagoda that suggested the foreign name for the Anchorage. Here we have to transfer to a steam launch or sailboat. In the summer of 1884 the French, at the time of their invasion, destroyed the arsenal and shipyard just above Pagoda Island, hence those we see are the creations of a later day. The arsenal, as is well known, is now under French control. On a hill not far away a British flag floats proudly to the breeze, reminding us that there is here a branch office of the Foochow Consulate of that nationality in charge of a Vice-Consul. On the south side of the river are the buildings of the Imperial Customs, also residences and schools of the American Board Mission.

A little higher than Pagoda Anchorage the river is divided into two branches by an island which extends to a point about seven miles above Foochow. As we ascend the north branch of the river, Kushan (山 鼓), or Drum Mountain, rises boldly away to the right. Receding still farther, and forming part of the amphitheatre in which Foochow is situated, is the Drum Range, or Kuliang, a favourite summer resort.

A dozen miles to the left our attention is attracted by “Tiger Head Mountain,” which has been nicknamed “Lover’s Leap” by some sentimental foreigner. Long ages ago a prophet declared that when this mountain falls the city will be destroyed. To prevent such a catastrophe two stone lions, which face the dangerous precipice, have been set up within the walls.
Soon after our boat rounds Kushan Point, two pagodas, which are in
the city, loom up five or six miles ahead of us. Another prominent landmark
is a watch-tower situated at the extreme northern angle of the city wall and
christened "Noah's Ark." As we continue to ascend the river we discern,
several miles ahead, some saw-mills and a match factory, erected during recent
years. Tea hongs and other foreign buildings also appear. On a hill, running
parallel with the river, we can soon point out the Foochow Club, the British
Consulate, and the Methodist Mission Compound and Publishing House, near
which is Tieng Ang Dong—"Church of Heavenly Peace"—where worship
one of the largest native congregations in the land. Farther west are the
British Episcopal Church, the buildings of the Anglo-Chinese College—
-founded by a wealthy native Christian—and the American
Consulate. Now our boat
approaches the solidly-built
Bund near the fine establish-
ment of Messrs. Jardine,
Matheson & Co., and the
main building of the Imperial
Customs. Going ashore here
we find ourselves in a very
important section of the busi-
ness community.

Beyond the hill spoken of
above are residences, several
churches and schools, a
woman's hospital and other
buildings, also the race-course
and recreation ground. Here
also are the three foreign
cemeteries, in one of which
our attention is especially
drawn to the beautiful angel-
monument over the graves
of the Missionaries who, on
August 1st, 1895, lost their lives in the massacre at Hwashan, near
Kucheng. The island on which the foreign settlement is located is the
principal native burying-ground for Foochow city. The horse-shoe, or
omega-shaped graves so common in this part of China, are objects of
interest to travellers.
The Min is here divided into two streams by Chung-chow (州 中) or "Middle Island," the spot where the American Board and Methodist Episcopal Missions first gained a footing in this region. The river is here spanned by two remarkable bridges. The shorter one reaches southward from Middle Island to the foreign settlement while the longer—the "Bridge of Ten Thousand Ages" (橋 隱 萬) extends northward from the island to the mainland. These bridges and the "Bridge of the Cloudy Hill," five or six miles farther up the river, are similarly constructed, being built entirely of granite. The bridges near the foreign settlement have doubtless been in existence more than eight centuries.

The bridge of Ten Thousand Ages, which is 1350 feet long, has thirty-five buttresses, placed at irregular intervals, a number of them being forty-eight feet apart. Reaching from each buttress to the next are four immense sleepers laid side by side. Most of them are as much as three feet square, and several are more than forty-five feet long. The uneven flagstone
floor is laid crosswise upon the sleepers. Along each side of the bridge extends a balustrade consisting of flat granite slabs about twelve feet long, two feet wide, and four inches thick. Their ends are set in heavy stone posts, the summits of which are cut into various shapes, some being ornamented (?) with lions. “How were those immense sleepers lifted into position?” is a question asked by strangers. All is simple enough when it occurs to them that the tides were compelled to perform the herculean task. Still, these structures are monuments of the ingenuity of those early builders. They are, however, mere foot-bridges, because this part of the country is too rough and hilly even for a wheelbarrow. Goods of all kinds have to be carried on the shoulders of men and women, the mode of land travel being by sedan-chair. The multifarious traffic conducted in the small booths on each side of the entire length of those bridges and the noisy, bustling crowds always surging back and forth across them—except at dead of night—are good illustrations of Oriental life.

When crossing here, I have sometimes halted to watch the process of fishing for cormorants, called by the Chinese (鷺鷥). The fisherman stands on a raft fifteen or twenty feet long and made in half-a-dozen large bamboos fastened firmly together. The birds crouch stupidly on the raft until the fisherman begins operations by pushing or throwing one of them into the water. When it declines to dive and swims back towards the boat, the man beats the water with his paddle or strikes the bird a light blow, so it is glad to keep beyond his reach. It rises to the surface after catching a fish, which
it is prevented from swallowing—unless the fish is large—by means of a ring around its neck. When it seizes a large fish, a hard struggle takes place between the would-be captor and captive, and eager crowds often watch the issue, i.e., whether the fish will succeed in extricating itself from the bird's beak in time to regain its liberty. For at this juncture the fisherman paddles rapidly towards the scene of combat and, when near enough, dextrously scoops up both bird and fish in a net-like bag, which is attached to the end of a long pole. The bird is then forced to relinquish its prey, but receives as its reward a mouthful or two of food which it can swallow when the ring is properly adjusted.

![FLIGHT OF STEPS LEADING TO KUSHAN TEMPLE.](image)

Extending along the north bank of the river and some distance back, is a thickly-populated area. In this section is the Provincial Mint, which occupies a foreign house near the river. A long, narrow suburb, traversed most of the way by a single street, extends from the bridge to the south gate of the city proper, a distance of nearly two miles. Let us take a chair and wend our way along this thoroughfare. As the shops are entirely open in front during the day, we can see their contents and activities while our bearers push their way through the crowds. Here before our eyes is manufacturing in the literal sense of the word. Wire-pullers, brassiers, button and comb makers, makers of images, lamps, trunks, shoes, and umbrellas, carpenters, wood-turners, curriers, tailors, gold- and silver-leaf beaters, cotton beaters,
weavers, stone-cutters, engravers, decorators, and other busy artificers are working away before the public gaze, supplying the necessities and luxuries of Chinese civilisation. Our attention is especially attracted by groups of as many as four blacksmiths, who, with almost the rapidity of a trip-hammer, are alternating their heavy blows on the same part of a piece of red-hot iron as it rests on an anvil. Nor do we fail, while passing along, to admire the curio establishments and the gay porcelain and silk shops.

I may here mention that among the curios made at Foochow are figures, vases, models of temples, widows' arches, pagodas, etc., carved in what is commonly, but erroneously, known as soap-stone, the correct name being agalmatolite or pagodite. Its structure is quartzose, yet it is so soft and unctuous as to resemble talc or steatite. It is opaque, generally of a reddish or greyish white, and sometimes veined with a deeper tint. Among other objects of interest in the shops are exquisitely executed artificial flowers, made from the vegetable pith known as rice-paper; also curious figures of birds, carved in charcoal and so coloured as to represent the living original. It is said that the art of lacquering, as practised here, was derived from the Japanese. A family in the city has long possessed the secret and the monopoly of making "the genuine Foochow lacquer," considered as unsurpassed, and sold at exceedingly high prices.

The native city is surrounded by a massive stone wall, nearly seven miles in extent. It is flanked at intervals by bastions and each of its seven gates is surmounted by one of those high structures which make
such an imposing appearance. Let us climb the watch-tower, “Noah's Ark,” which we saw when coming up the river. From this elevation of over

three hundred feet the eye takes in the magnificent amphitheatre in which Foochow is situated. With the exception of the north side, the city is
surrounded, for greater or less distances, by a somewhat level tract, intersected by canals and by the winding branches of the Min and dotted with a multitude of hamlets and villages. Farther away on all sides a rampart of mountains and hills adds to the grandeur of the scene while, near at hand, is the city and its immediate suburbs. Within the walls few buildings rise above the one-story level to break the monotony of tile roofs, pagodas being about the only prominent structures, though the eye is arrested by "mandarin poles" in front of the different yamens.

Prominent in the south-western part of the city is Black Rock Hill (山石鳥), which is about three hundred feet high. In the early days of the port this spot was one of the places of residence for the British Consul, whose house and offices were, however, in the foreign settlement. This plan was adopted in order to check all attempts to imitate in Foochow the exclusive policy so long carried out in the native city of Canton.

Much trouble was caused long ago by our Viceroy, who memorialised the Throne to the effect that certain foreigners ought not to be permitted to erect mission buildings on Black Rock Hill, because of the alarming fact that a great Dragon rests underneath Foochow and supports the city; and that, at this particular spot, his veins and arteries come so near the surface that his circulation would be impeded by the weight of the buildings, thus exciting his displeasure and calling down dire evils upon the people.

Nevertheless, some six or seven years ago, the ladies of the American Methodist Mission bought a site on this much-discussed hill for a hospital, with the understanding that it would be used for this purpose only. For, strange to say, though Fengshui and the Dragon have a strong antipathy to churches and chapels, the healing art does not, as a rule, seem to arouse their ire. It must be added, however, that their representative, the local gentry, have thus far successfully opposed the stamping of the deed to this fine site.
In the south-east part of the city is the Hill of the Nine Genii (山仙九). Near this and the White Pagoda are the premises of the American Board Mission, including the Foochow College and a hospital for women and children.

Foochow is called the "Banyan City" (城榕) as trees of this order are numerous there, but other varieties of shade trees also abound and give certain sections of the city the appearance of being embowered in extensive groves.

The Tartars occupy part of the eastern half of the city. Just outside of the east wall and near the Tang Men, or "Hot Water Gate," are springs which are used extensively for bathing purposes by the Chinese, who regard them as curative for skin diseases. The water is hot and clear. It rises not only in one spot, but bubbles up from the beds of streams in the neighbourhood. Bathing houses have been built over some of the springs, while others are more simply utilized by means of tanks in the open air.
Thousands of women in Foochow and vicinity are employed in farming and as burden bearers, but never as chair-bearers. The coiffure of this class of women attracts attention on account of their enormous hairpins, which are sometimes made of silver. This robust class of women form a striking contrast to their sisters of the so-called higher classes who, when they appear at all, go hobbling about on their tiny, bound feet. In some secluded villages in the hills, a dozen miles north-west of Foochow, are the remnants of a tribe of aborigines whom I visited a year ago. The men appeared like the Chinese, but the women, who were very shy, are objects of curiosity, because they do up their hair in such a strange looking frame.

Few public buildings in Foochow are sufficiently unique to justify a visit, especially if one has seen the great temples at Hangchow, Canton, and elsewhere. It may be mentioned, however, that the Temple to the Goddess of Heaven (后天 or 婆婆祖馬), which is in the suburbs, is one of the most richly adorned places of worship in this region. This deity is the special protector of sailors.

The attraction of sport and the picturesque scenery of the out-lying districts—most of which can be reached by houseboat—render excursions a favourite mode of relaxation. Tiger hunting in the Kucheng Mountains and elsewhere has also been indulged in, but one of the most interesting trips in
the neighbourhood of Foochow is to Kushan. A celebrated Buddhist Temple is built at a height of some 2,000 feet, or about 1,000 feet below the summit of the mountain. A well-paved road about six feet wide leads from the foot of the mountain to the gate of the temple. The toilsome ascent is amply repaid by the charming views of Foochow, its suburbs, the valley of the Min, and the hills and mountains beyond, as disclosed on successive stages of the journey. The chief attraction which draws multitudes to this shrine is a relic popularly believed to be one of the teeth of Buddha, whose sacred jaws yielded precious deposits for almost every temple of note in the Chinese Empire, not to speak of other lands. Many of the Chinese, however, ascend Kushan in order to witness a sunrise from its summit—a glorious sight, indeed, especially as from that elevation the ocean, the rugged coast-line, and adjacent islands are visible.

Some years ago a gentleman, when describing his experience in trying to “hustle the East,” wrote some lines which are, perhaps, worth quoting here. All residents of this place would agree that his “poem” is a libel on the city and people he claims to describe:—
My friends, have you heard of the town of Foochow,
On the bank of the River Slow,
Where blooms the wait-a-while flower fair,
Where the some-time-or-other scents the air,
And the soft go-easys grow?
It lies in the valley of What's-the-use
In the province of Let-her-slide,
And “that-tired-feeling” is native there;
It's the home of the reckless-I-don't-care,
Where the give-it-ups abide.
It stands at the bottom of Lazy Hill,
And is easy to reach, I declare:
You've only to fold up your hands and glide
Down the slope of Weak-will's slippery-slide
To be landed quickly there.
The town is as old as the human race
And it grows with the flight of years:
It is wrapped in the fog of idler's dreams;
Its streets are paved with discarded schemes
And sprinkled with useless tears.