

On arriving near the frontier of China Proper, Chinese officers again came to meet them, and one march further on they found a platform with awnings erected in the desert, and an elegant repast set out for them, such as many cities would have found it difficult to furnish. Provisions of all sorts were also supplied to every member of the party, with many polite forms. The envoys were then called on to subscribe a document declaring the number of persons in their service, and the *Dájis*¹ had to make affidavit that nothing but truth was stated. The merchants who had accompanied the embassy were counted among the servants, and to give a colour to this they employed themselves in waiting on the ambassadors. There were five hundred and ten souls in the party, without counting Mirza Olug Beg's envoys who had gone on before, and those of Mirza Ibrahim Sultan not yet arrived.

Next day they were invited to a feast of royal magnificence at the camp of the *Dangchi* commanding on the frontier.² The envoys took their places at the left hand of the *Dangchi*, that being the position of honour in Cathay, "because the heart is on the left side." Before each of the envoys two tables were placed, on one of which were various dishes of meat and poultry and dried fruits; on the other cake, excellent bread, and artificial bouquets made of paper and silk admirably wrought. The other guests had but one table apiece. Elevated before them there was a great royal drum, and in front of this a buffet on which were ranged flagons, cups, and goblets of silver and porcelain.³ On either side of this was an elaborate orchestra, which played admirably. One of the great Chinese lords presented the cup to each guest in turn, and as he did so took a sprig from a basket of artificial flowers, and placed it in the other's cap, "so that the pavilion presented the appearance of a parterre of roses." Beautiful children also were in attendance carrying dishes filled with various relishes, such as filberts, jujubes, walnuts, pickles, etc., every kind being disposed on the plate in a separate compartment. When the amir presented the cup to any person of distinction one of these children also presented this plate that he might choose what pleased him. Dances were performed by young men in feminine costume, and by figures of animals made of pasteboard with men inside; among others a perfect representation of a stork, which bobbed its head to the music, this way and that, to the admiration of the spectators. Altogether the first Chinese fête seems to have been regarded as a great success.

¹ It is not explained who the *Dájis* were, but the word seems to be a Tartar form of the Chinese *Tajin*, "great man," a title still applied to certain officers on the Tartar frontiers. They must have been Chinese officials who had joined the mission party at an earlier date.

² This perhaps represents the Chinese *Tsiang-shi*, a general. Pauthier however, I see, says it is in Chinese *Tangchi*, without further explanation (*M. Polo*, 166).

³ See this feature in the receptions of the Turk and Tartar Khans, in the extracts from Menander (p. clxiv, *supra*, and note there).