

it. Indeed, we are told that its current is so rapid that its navigation is scarcely practicable, and the only traffic of the kind that we hear of is a transport of coal in Shan-si for a certain distance down stream. This rapidity also, bringing down vast quantities of soil, has so raised the bed that in recent times the tide has not entered the river, as it probably did in our traveller's time, when, as it would appear from his account, seagoing craft used to ascend to the ferry north of Hwai-ngan fu, or thereabouts. Another indication of change is his statement that the passage just mentioned was only one day's journey from the sea, whereas it is now about 50 miles in a direct line. But the river has of late years undergone changes much more material.

In the remotest times of which the Chinese have any record, the Hwang-Ho discharged its waters into the Gulf of Chih-li, by two branches, the most northerly of which appears to have followed the present course of the Pei-ho below Tien-tsing. In the time of the Shang Dynasty (ending B.C. 1078) a branch more southerly than either of the above flowed towards T'si-ning, and combined with the T'si River, which flowed by T'si-nan fu, the same in fact that was till recently called the Ta-t'sing. In the time of Confucius we first hear of a branch being thrown off south-east towards the Hwai, flowing north of Hwai-ngan, in fact towards the embouchure which our maps still display as that of the Hwang-Ho. But, about the 3rd and 4th centuries of our era, the river discharged exclusively by the T'si; and up to the Mongol age, or nearly so, the mass of the waters of this great river continued to flow into the Gulf of Chih-li. They then changed their course bodily towards the Hwai, and followed that general direction to the sea; this they had adopted before the time of our traveller, and they retained it till a very recent period. The mass of Shan-tung thus forms a mountainous island rising out of the vast alluvium of the Hwang-Ho, whose discharge into the sea has alternated between the north and the south of that mountainous tract. (*See Map opposite.*)

During the reign of the last Mongol emperor, a project was adopted for restoring the Hwang-Ho to its former channel, discharging into the Gulf of Chih-li; and discontents connected with this scheme promoted the movement for the expulsion of the dynasty (1368).

A river whose regimen was liable to such vast changes was necessarily a constant source of danger, insomuch that the Emperor Kia-K'ing in his will speaks of it as having been "from the remotest ages China's sorrow." Some idea of the enormous works maintained for the control of the river may be obtained from the following description of their character on the north bank, some distance to the west of Kai-fung fu:

"In a village, apparently bounded by an earthen wall as large as that of the Tartar city of Peking, was reached the first of the outworks erected to resist the Hwang-Ho, and on arriving at the top that river and the gigantic earthworks rendered necessary by its outbreaks burst on the view. On a level with the spot on which I was standing stretched a series of embankments, each one about 70 feet high, and of breadth sufficient for four railway trucks to run abreast on them. The mode of their arrangement was on this wise: one long bank ran parallel to the direction of the stream; half a mile distant from it ran a similar one; these two embankments were then connected by another series exactly similar in size, height, and breadth, and running at right angles to them right down to the edge of the water."

In 1851, the Hwang-Ho burst its northern embankment nearly 30 miles east of Kai-fung fu; the floods of the two following years enlarged the breach; and in 1853 the river, after six centuries, resumed the ancient direction of its discharge into the Gulf of Chih-li. Soon after leaving its late channel, it at present spreads, without defined banks, over the very low lands of South-Western Shan-tung, till it reaches the Great Canal, and then enters the Ta-t'sing channel, passing north of T'si-nan to the sea. The old channel crossed by Polo in the present journey is quite deserted. The greater part of the bed is there cultivated; it is dotted with numerous villages; and the vast trading town of Tsing-kiang pu was in 1868 extending so rapidly from the