

The Roman-Catholic missionary station is close to the temples in a modest little clay building. A young missionary, Jos. Essens, a Dutchman by birth, has been at its head for scarcely a year. Tchyng, a Chinaman from Lianchow, acts as his assistant. It gave me great pleasure to meet a European again after three months of solitude. He was a good horseman and shot and seemed a lively young man in spite of the serious calling he had embraced with apparent enthusiasm. My thanks are due to him for much information and good advice.

The fairly large space in front of the missionary station has not been built over since the destruction caused by the Dungan revolt. The Taotai's yamen is said to have stood there formerly. Now both it and the yamen of the Djentai are situated quite close to each other in a corner of the town diagonally opposite. Nearer the centre of the town two column-like slender towers of clay rise high above the one-storeyed houses.

Suchow is the capital of a Taotai district that embraces the districts of Ansi, Suchow tchou and Chinta tchoutung. Ansi has the towns of Tun-huang and Yumen-hsien shen as subordinate districts, Suchow includes Gaotai and Chinta includes Memotin (?). The town lies halfway between Ili and Peiping and is of some importance for transit trade between Kouli and Kouwei. As at Hami, a stay is usually made at Suchow either before or after the exhausting journey across the desert. Merchants and arbah caravans with goods provide themselves here with anything they may require; mandarins make a longer stay in order to breathe the Kouli air as long as possible (when travelling eastward) or again to enjoy the first proper town in Kouli, frequently after an absence of many years. In either direction the distance is calculated as so many times 18 days. A courier to the Bogdykhan, however, is expected to cover the whole distance in twice 18 days. There are still the same couriers to-day as seven hundred years ago, when they hurried night and day — often with their lives at stake — along the strategic routes of Jenghiz Khan drawn across unbroken ground by stationing herds of horses, guarded by a few Mongols, at equal distances from each other in the main directions. Just as in the distant legendary days of that powerful prince his courier rushed on at a wild gallop from one station to another, the messenger of the Dzian Dziun at Ili covers the long road from Qulja to Peiping at breakneck speed. The station is warned by the courier's bell, sounding far off in the desert, and when the rider arrives, its fastest horse is ready saddled. Only the strongest physique can stand the strain and the task is so exhausting that it is often the courier's last ride.

The arrival of a high mandarin is celebrated by dinners given in his honour and returned by him, theatrical performances etc. To the local mandarin and especially to the population these visits of mandarins are a real burden. Their servants, animals and carts are maintained by the district, however long they may elect to stay in a place. When news comes of the approach of a mandarin, all the available arbahs and horses in the town at that time are stopped by order of the mandarin of the district. Utterly regardless of the loss suffered through such inactivity by the people, who usually earn just sufficient under ordinary circumstances to maintain themselves and their beasts, they are forced to keep themselves at the disposal of the mandarin for several days free of charge. It can be