

December 13th.
Shuang-ching-
tzu station.

Our journey to-day took us close by the temple with the tower, SE of the town. This was the only tower I saw in Chinta, in fact one might suppose that it was here to give the name Chinta. a «raison d'être». Chin means gold, golden; ta means tower; Chinta = the golden tower. It is, indeed, not of gold, nor even gilded, but at any rate it is a tower. Part of the ruined wall that bounds the oasis in the S, passes close to the temple. I was told that the whole oasis was once, or still is, entirely enclosed by a wall, but I could not ascertain what date it was. In general the Chinese here have no idea of the past history of the place. In reply to my questions the mandarin said that everything was put down in the books of the yamen, but that he had not wasted time in studying them. I was told that the tower had been built in the time of the Emperor Ming and that during the time of the Emperor Yntchin the district mandarin resided in the town of Vei-lu about 30 li to the NW. The ruins of a Tchantu town are said to exist there, but the local people have not found any ancient objects. Chinta was formerly called Wang za tchuang and a Tchantu wang was resident there.

The untilled area begins on the other side of the wall, dotted at first with many Chinese tombs. By a slow ascent the road took us in a SE direction towards the mountains which we had passed on the journey from Ning shui to Chinta. They have the same character here of a conglomeration of a large number of gravel hills. Here, however, the hills are of greater length and are like ridges. The highest point, a kind of small pass, lies 8 miles from the town. The chain of mountains runs westward approximately in a direction of 108° . In the E no range is distinguishable; there is a sort of collection of high-lying, flat, terrace-like hills. During the ascent the road bisects a couple of small valleys. There are dry river beds at the bottom of two of them in a NW and NNE direction. The descent is imperceptible. For about a mile and a half we rode at practically the same level and then the ground began to fall very slightly. On the sand and gravel that had so far been entirely barren a kind of small creeping bush began to appear on the southern slope, growing on tiny hummocks at very great intervals. The gravel on the hills ceased about 6 miles from the highest point of the day and we entered a belt of sand, thickly strewn with large hummocks, on which the same bush-like plant grew, though rather larger in size. About a mile further on, sparse and low-growing reeds appeared and very soon we were on typical, slightly porous ground with large white deposits of salt. During the descent I was unable to discern any range of hills with a decided direction. The hills run into the ground to the S. It was only when we came to a slight, long, ridge-like eminence running southward on the left that the terrain acquired any mountainous characteristics.

The Shuang-ching-tzu sarai is really the first arbah station E of Suchow, from which it is 100 li distant. The distance from Chinta is about 18 miles. The road is good and the ground firm. A ruined impanj stands next to the sarai. There are 3 sarais, 2 wells with plenty of good water, 1 mapoza station and 1 pazung of 10 men of the Tcheni garrison. — Westerly burans are rare, but occur in the autumn and spring. Snow from the 10—11th Chinese month to the 2nd, 2—3 vershoks in depth. There is rain in the 4th—8th months, but seldom.