

they had to wait twenty-five days for an answer from the Viceroy of the province.²⁵ When they were at last admitted within the wall, they reached, after one more day's travelling, the city of *Sucieu*.²⁶ It was there at Su-chou that 'Benedict parted with his last lingering doubt as to the identity in all but name of Cathay and China'. But that he was destined to be detained there for sixteen weary months longer until death relieved him of all trouble in April, 1607, is striking proof of the vigour with which the temporary admission of foreigners was controlled even after they had been allowed to pass through the Gate of Chia-yü kuan.²⁶

SECTION III.—SU-CHOU AND THE CENTRAL NAN-SHAN

Importance
of Su-chou
since Han
conquest.

The city of Su-chou 肅州, which I reached from Chia-yü kuan on July 22, has, as far back as our historical records permit us to go, been always a place of very considerable importance. On this account I felt glad that the stay of six days, which arrangements for my explorations in the Nan-shan obliged me to make there,¹ allowed me to acquaint myself to some extent with its local conditions and surroundings. We have had already occasion to note that immediately after the Emperor Wu-ti's conquest of the territories along the northern foot of the Nan-shan the Chiu-ch'üan command was established for the purpose of organizing the newly annexed region, with headquarters at what is now Su-chou.² We have also found the important part which the command there located took in extending and consolidating the Limes line to and beyond Tun-huang clearly attested by an original Limes document.³

Agricultural
produce
and trade of
Su-chou.

Owing to plentiful irrigation assured by the Pei-ta Ho and other rivers which bring down the drainage of three snowy ranges of the Nan-shan,⁴ the extent and fertility of the cultivated area of the district are great. They have made Su-chou the natural main base of supplies for all Chinese enterprise directed towards the 'Western regions'. This rôle has been retained by the place from early Han times down to modern days; for it was mainly at Su-chou that the campaign of 1877 resulting in the successful reconquest of the 'New Dominion' was prepared. Only after resettling the district, then wholly depopulated by the Tungan rebellion, were the means secured for moving an army across the desert north-westwards.⁵ For the same reason Su-chou must always have been important as an emporium of trade as long as commerce in silk and other Chinese products flourished along the Central-Asian highways.⁶ Even now, when conditions have greatly changed

²⁵ We are told further on that the Viceroy of the province of *Scensi*, i.e. Shen-hsi, to which these frontier districts then belonged, resided at Canceu, i.e. Kan-chou.

²⁶ William Finch, too, when recording in 1611 information gathered at Lahore about Central-Asian trade routes, knew of Chia-yü kuan. He clearly refers to it in his notice of the trade from Yärkand to 'China, the gate or entrance whereof is some two or three months journey from hence. When they come to this entrance, they are forced to remain under their tents, and by license send some ten or fifteen merchants at once to do their business; which being returned, they may send as many more. But by no means can the whole caravan enter at once.' Cf. Stein, *Journal of the Punjab Historical Society*, vi. pp. 144 sq.; *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, vol. I, bk. iv, ch. 4, p. 434.

¹ Cf. *Desert Cathay*, ii. pp. 285 sqq.

² See above, p. 724; Chavannes, *Documents*, p. v, note 5, gives 115 B.C. as the most likely date for the establishment of the Chiu-ch'üan command.

³ See above, pp. 740 sq.

⁴ As Maps Nos. 88, 89, 92 show, the Pei-ta Ho and Hung-shui-pa Ho drain big valleys flanked by the Alexander III, To-lai-shan, and Richthofen ranges; the crests of these for great distances are covered with permanent snow, if not ice. In addition to these rivers a series of streams coming from the northern face of the Richthofen range helps to irrigate numerous clusters of villages along the foot of the mountains; see Map No. 88. c, d, 2, 3.

⁵ It is largely to the Su-chou district that the well-known story applies of the reconquering Chinese army under Liu Chin-t'ang and Tso Tsung-t'ang having halted on the way for a year or two to sow the fields in tracts laid waste and to reap their harvest before continuing the advance towards Turkestan. A close study of that campaign would throw interesting sidelights on various aspects of the operations by which the Chinese armies of Han times pushed their way into the Tārīm Basin across formidable deserts, and on their methods of organization.

⁶ Cf. the account of the Persian merchant Hājī Muḥammad interviewed by Ramusio at Venice about A.D. 1550,