

# TRADE ROUTES TO WESTERN CHINA

**E-ASIA**

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON LIBRARIES



**E-ASIA**  
university of oregon libraries

<http://e-asia.uoregon.edu>

ARTICLE VI.

---

TRADE ROUTES TO WESTERN CHINA.\*

BY

**ALEX. HOSIE, Esq.,**  
*Of H.B.M.'s Consular Service.*

---

JOURNAL OF THE CHINA BRANCH  
OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY  
FOR THE YEAR 1884

New Series, Vol. XIX, Part I.  
SHANGHAI: Published by the Society, 1885.  
pp. 103-114

ARTICLE VI.

---

TRADE ROUTES TO WESTERN CHINA.\*

BY

**ALEX. HOSIE, Esq.,**  
*Of H.B.M.'s Consular Service.*

---

**BARON F. VON RICHTHOFEN** in his valuable letter addressed to the Committee of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce in 1872 devotes an occasional page to the subject of Trade Routes in Western China, more especially in the province of Yünnan ; but, as that distinguished traveller was, owing to an unfortunate accident, compelled to abandon his projected journey from Ssü-ch'uan into Yünnan, and his descriptions of the trade roads in the latter province were therefore derived from hearsay, it may not be out of place for one who has recently performed the journey which he abandoned, and who has traversed four trade roads to Yünnan, to endeavour to supplement his remarks.

I shall not, however, confine my attention to the province of Yünnan; but I shall endeavour briefly to point out the existing trade routes to Western China, and to examine their relative advantages.

By Western China I mean the provinces of Ssü-ch'uan, Kueichou, and Yünnan.

I.—SSÜ-CH'UAN.

The great trade highway into Ssu-ch'uan is the River Yangtze and its numerous tributaries.

By the Agreement of Chefoo facilities were granted for the navigation of the Upper Yangtze by the opening of the port of Ichang and the permission to ascend by steamer as far west as Ch'ungk'ing, the great commercial centre of the province of Ssü-ch'uan

Advantage has been taken of these facilities to navigate as far as Ichang; and, except during the winter months when shallows interfere with vessels drawing more than six

---

Read before the Society on the 25th March, 1884.

feet, a steamer runs regularly between Hankow and Ichang; and I understand that a Company has

recently been formed whose object it is to run a couple of steamers between these two places at all seasons.

No attempt has yet been made, however, to steam as far west as Ch'ungk'ing ; and one would naturally assume that obstacles bar the way. All the year round native boats navigate the waters between Ichang and Ch'ungk'ing, and we hesitate to be driven to the conclusion that obstacles surmountable by native craft are insurmountable by steam.

The obstacles to native craft are the rapids and the strong current, the former when the river is low, that is, during winter and spring, and the latter during the rest of the year when the river is flooded. Many of the larger boats have a draught of more than five feet, and insufficient depth of water has never been adduced as an obstacle to steam. In ascending from Ichang these boats, except in the gorges where the current is sluggish, are tracked by the river's bank; and when the river is low, they are dragged over the rapids by sheer human strength. I say, when the river is low, for during summer and autumn the rapids disappear under the great rise of water, and then there exists no obstacle to prevent a steamer of sufficient power from ascending as far as Ch'ungk'ing and even as far as Hsüchou Fu, better known as Sui Fu, which for all practical purposes is the highest navigable point on the River Yangtze.

We have said that the Yangtze is the great trade highway into Ssü-ch'uan, and from and to it goods are carried by land and water, principally the latter.

The Kia-ling, which enters the Yangtze at Ch'ungk'ing, supplies the north and partly the east ; the T'o, which enters the Yangtze at Luchou, supplies the centre ; and the Min, which joins the Yangtze at Sui Fu, supplies the capital and the west of the province. These streams also bring down to the Great River, as the Yangtze is called between Ichang and Sui Fu, the products of the districts which they drain.

In addition to these three streams which enter the Yangtze from the north, are several others which join it from the south ; but they are more concerned with supplying goods to and bringing produce from Kueichou and Yünnan

page 105

than the south of Ssü-ch'uan, and will be noticed when we come to deal with these provinces.

The time and labour required to carry the goods by native craft from Ichang to Ch'ungk'ing and to distribute them throughout the province, seriously raise the value of the goods and necessarily limit their consumption; and there cannot be the least doubt that, were the facilities granted by the Agreement of Chefoo taken advantage of, goods could be laid down economically and without risk in Ch'ungk'ing, and a great development of the trade in substantial foreign manufactures would be the result.

The province of Ssü-ch'uan contains a population some five or six times greater than either Kueichou or Yünnan, and a population wealthy as compared with the populations of these smaller provinces;

and the energy of the foreign merchant instead of being wholly diverted to supplying the requirements of Yünnan—requirements insignificant when those of Ssü-ch'uan are considered—should be devoted to availing himself of the advantages conceded by the Agreement of Chefoo, and thereby open up to foreign trade the largest province in the Empire with its population of about thirty millions.

But let not the foreign manufacturer and merchant think, as some recent writers would have then believe—that these millions of Western China are waiting to array themselves in foreign piece goods. No such thing. For the ordinary working classes, such as agriculturists, carriers and coolies, which form a large proportion of the population, these goods are altogether unsuited; and to supply their wants Ssü-ch'uan annually imports from the Hukuang provinces raw cotton and manufactured goods, the value of which cannot be placed at less than two millions sterling. These cottons are warm and substantial; and when the wear and tear of years have reduced them to rags, they are converted to numerous other uses.

The foreign manufacturer and merchant may well be content if they can supply that percentage of the population, such as shopkeepers and the wealthier classes, which has not to earn its livelihood by hard manual labour.

In a word, the trade highway into Ssü-ch'uan is the Upper Yangtze. For conducting and developing this trade, facilities have been granted by the Agreement of Chefoo;

page 106

but hitherto they have not been taken advantage of, owing to certain obstacles which sooner or later will be found to be more imaginary than real.

Is the trade of Ch'ungking, which now falls little short of forty million taels a year, to be left undeveloped? I leave the answer to the foreign merchant. That no other trade route can possibly compete with the Yangtze route I shall endeavour to show anon.

When the Yangtze is flooded the greater part of the junks are laid up, the owners preferring to relinquish freight rather than expose their property to the numerous risks which threaten unwieldy craft during summer and autumn; and since at these seasons no obstacles exist to the navigation of the Upper Yangtze, almost the entire carrying trade would fall to a steamer.

There is a trade route from Canton to Ssü-ch'uan before the opening of the Yangtze a most important route—a great part of which can be accomplished on the inland waters of the provinces of Kuangtung, Hunan, and Ssü-ch'uan. The trade along this route is now insignificant, consisting for the most part of peddlery, and is of no interest to foreign commerce with which in these pages we are more immediately concerned. For the same reason I pass over without remark the great northern trade road to Ch'êng-tu, the provincial capital of Ssü-ch'uan, and the road from the latter city to Thibet by way of Lithang and Bathang.

The River Yangtze is also the basis of trade routes to the province of Kueichou. These we shall discuss in order, beginning from the east.

*(1). One of the most important trade routes to Kueichou begins at Hankow, crosses the Tung-t'ing Lake, and ascends the Yüan River as far as the city of Chên-yüan Fu, the highest navigable point in Kueichou, and distant seven days' journey from Kueiyang Fu, the capital of the province. This is well known as the route followed by the late Mr. Margary on his way to Yunnan.*

Goods intended for the east of Kueichou are mostly carried by this route, which, although occupying more time— . at least two months—than the Great River route to Ch'ung-king

page 107

and thence overland to Kueichou, is preferred to the latter for various and some of them obvious reasons. The whole journey into eastern Kueichou can be performed by water without a single transshipment; the imposts leviable in Ssü-ch'uan on goods passing through the province are avoided; and, although there are numerous rapids which seriously interfere with the navigation of the Yüan River, they are not so dangerous or formidable for native craft as the rapids on the Great River.

For northern and western Kueichou other routes are followed ; and, with one exception, they all lie to the west of Ch'ungk'ing. This exception is the

*(2). Kung-t'an River or Wu River route.*

The Kung-t'an River, which enters the Yangtze at Fuchou, seventy-two geographical miles to the east of Ch'ungk'ing, derives its name from a place called Kung-t'an near the Ssü-ch'uan-Kueichou border, and distant four hundred and fifty *li* from its mouth. This river, which rises in the west of Kueichou and crosses the province, is known as the Wu River until it reaches the frontier. It is also called the Fuchou River from the city at its mouth.

It is not navigable the whole distance from Fuchou to Kung-t'an, for goods have to be transhipped at a place called Yang-ko-ch'i, 120 *li* from Fuchou, and carried overland a distance of about a mile. The chief places on its banks are Yang-ko-ch'i, Chiang-k'ou, P'eng-shui Hsien, and Kung-t'an, distant respectively 120, 210, 330, and 450 *li* from Fuchou.

The up trade is insignificant; but the down trade is important, consisting principally of wood-oil, bean-cake, opium, hemp, indigo, charcoal, firewood, Indian corn, potatoes, cereals, and drugs.

The river is shallow, and only boats of light draught attempt the up-journey, which occupies some five days.

*(3). The Ch'ungk'ing overland and*

(4). *Ch`i-chiang River routes.*

These are virtually one route, as the Ch'ungk'ing overland route passes Ch'i-chiang Hsien from which the river derives its name. The overland journey from

page 108

Ch'ungk'ing to Ch'i-chiang Hsien occupies three days, while four days are required to accomplish the journey by boat from the mouth of the river to the district city. Above Ch'i-chiang Hsien the river is very shallow and is navigable only by the smallest craft as far as Hsin-chan in Kueichou, another two days' journey. From Ch'i-chiang Hsien goods can be carried to Kueiyang Fu, the capital of Kueichou in twelve days or even less.

This is an important trade route, and by it north-eastern Kueichou is supplied with salt from Ssŭ-ch'uan.

Ch'i-chiang Hsien is distant 360 *li* from the river's mouth ; and the chief places on its banks are Pei-tu, Kuang hsing-ch'ang, Wu-ch'a-'ho, Chia-hsi-ch'iao, Chen-wu-ch'ang, Jên-shih-'to, and Chiang-k'ou at its junction with the, Great River.

(4). *The Jên-'huai River or Chih-shui River route.*

This river which in its upper waters is known as the Chih-shui, flows past Jên-'huai T'ing in northern Kueichou and enters the Great River at Ho-chiang Hsien, 95 geographical miles west of Ch'ungk'ing, and a three days' journey by river.

A glance at a map of China will show that at this point the Great River is no great distance from the Kueichou frontier ; and the up-river journey from Ho-chiang Hsien to Jên-'huai T'ing occupies only a couple of days. Between these two cities there are only two places of any importance, namely, Li-ch'i-tzŭ and Ch'uan-shih. The up trade consists almost entirely of Ssŭ-ch'uan salt ; the down trade in pine trees and in pine boards, bamboos, wood-oil, rape-seed oil, indigo, charcoal, firewood, lump coal, paper, cereals, and soot for the manufacture of ink.

(5). *The Luchou and Yung-ning River Route.*

With the exception of the Tung-t'ing Lake and Yuan River route, this is the most important trade road to Kueichou ; and, in my opinion, it is the best line of communication with Yŭnnan, from the Yangtze.

Luchou is a city of great commercial importance on the north bank of the Great River at its junction with the T'o River, 129 geographical miles west of Ch'ungk'ing. It is the great salt depot of Ssŭ-ch'uan. Thirteen miles west



of Luchou and on the opposite bank of the river is the district city of Na-chi, a place of no importance in itself ; but it lies on the right bank and at the mouth of the Yung-ning River, a waterway of the highest commercial value, for by this route the total salt supply of western Kueichou finds its way from Luchou. It is navigable as far as the district city of Yung-ping,—from which it derives its name, —and which is distant a three days' journey from the Kueichou frontier. From the frontier another three days are required to reach the flourishing district city of Pi-chieh, which, although one of the most important commercial cities in Kueichou, is not to be found on the ordinary foreign maps of China. This city is distant seven days' journey from Kueiyang Fu and fifteen days from Yünnan Fu.

The whole journey from Yünnan Fu to Luchou can thus be performed in twenty-two days, for the Yung-ning River can be descended in a single day, although during last year I was, owing to certain mishaps, detained a couple of days on it. On the up journey from Luchou to Yung-ning Hsien, boats have to be tracked the whole way, and a week or more is required to accomplish it according to the state of the river. The overland journey between these two places occupies four days. In many places the river is very narrow, and it has a fair number of rapids.

The road from Yung-ning Hsien to Yünnan Fu is one of the best I have seen in China. It is paved and in good repair throughout its whole length. Before the rebellion it was the chief outlet for the copper from the numerous mines in the west of Kueichou; and an attempt is now being made by the provincial authorities concerned to induce trade to revert to this channel. Unfortunately, however, there are three great obstacles to a swifter means of communication between the Yangtze and Yünnan Fu. They are the valleys of the K'o-tu, Ch'i-hsing, and Chih-shui Rivers respectively. Were these three deep and broad chasms bridged, as doubtless they could be, but at an enormous expense, we should not despair of seeing Yünnan Fu connected with Shanghai by steam.

As I have said above, the salt supply of western Kueichou follows this route, which is also followed by piece goods manufactured in Ssü-ch'uan from Hukuang

cotton. I was surprised that the trade with Yünnan by this route was not more extensive ; but the reason is not far to seek. Goods intended for Yünnan by this route have to pass through the province of Kueichou and thus incur additional taxation. It is only natural, therefore, that merchants should prefer to carry their goods into Yünnan by the Sui Fu route, of which I shall speak anon.

### III.—YÜNNAN.

I pass now to the province of Yünnan which has occupied so much of the attention of recent writers. The trade routes to this province are

- (1). *The Nan-kuang River route ;*
- (2). *The Ta-kuan River route.*

These two rivers enter the Yangtze the one below and the other above Sui Fu ; and they constitute what may be called the Sui Fu route to Yünnan. These two roads converge and meet at the town of Lao-ya-t'an—usually known as Lao-wa-t'an—which lies on the left bank of the Ta-kuan River within the Yünnan border in the prefecture of Chao-t'ung. Lao-ya-t'an is distant from Chao-t'ung Fu, Tungch'uan Fu, and Yünnan Fu, six, eleven, and nineteen days' journey respectively. From Lao-ya-t'an to Sui Fu the Ta-kuan River route is preferred because boat can be taken at Lao-ya-t'an ; whereas the Nan-kuang river is not navigable until the town of Huang-shui-k'ou, more than a three days' journey from Lao-ya-t'an and within the province of Ssü-ch'uan, is reached. Neither of the two rivers is navigable throughout; rocks bar the Nan-kuang River at its very mouth, while on the Ta-kuan River goods have to be transhipped and carried overland a distance of, fifteen *li* near the Yünnan-Ssü-ch'uan frontier. The road from Yünnan Fu to Lao-ya-t'an is difficult beyond description; it is infinitely inferior to the Luchou route ; and it may safely be predicted that it will always remain what it is—a very bad horse road. By this route northern Yünnan is supplied with foreign piece goods, salt, and Hukuang cottons, while lead, copper, sugar, and P'u-erh tea are the principal exports.

- (3). *The Chien-ch'ang valley route to Yünnan.*
- (4). *The Chien-ch'ang valley route by way of*

page 111

*Ningyüan Fu, Yen-yüan Hsien, and Yung-pei T'ing to western Yünnan.*

Goods are carried from Sui Fu up the Min River to Chiating Fu on its right bank and at its junction with the Ta-tu River. Here they are transhipped into smaller boats which carry them up the Ya-chou River, which enters the Ta-tu before its junction with the Min, to Yachou Fu, an important city four days south west of Ch'êngtu. From Yachou Fu they are conveyed overland south through Ching-chi Hsien, Yüeh-hsi T'ing, Ningyüan Fu, and Hui-li Chou to Yünnan.

It is a fourteen days' journey from Yachou Fu to Ningyüan Fu, and from the latter city nine more days are required to reach the Yünnan frontier.

The hopes which the traveller in search of trade routes clings to with tenacity are rudely and summarily blasted by a glance at the mountainous country through which this road passes ; nor is there any improvement when as a last chance he turns west from Ningyüan Fu in the desperate attempt to reach western Yünnan.

This latter route (No. 4) was described to Baron von Richthofen as the great trade highway from Tali Fu to Ch'êng-tu previous to the Mahomedan rebellion. I wish he had seen it! I was told the same story, and doubtless there is some truth in it ; but the vestiges of this great highway are few indeed—a yard or two of unburied pavement may be discovered occasionally on a mountain side—but the

greater part of it between Ningyüan Fu and Tali Fu is a mere bridle path winding up and down mountain sides. As evidence in support of the "great highway" theory I may state that I met a Thibetan caravan between these two places.

(5). Instead, however, of striking west from Ningyüan Fu the traveller may proceed south to Huili Chou, and thence turn south west to Tali Fu. Of this route, which is described as difficult, I have no personal knowledge ; but knowing the routes from Tali Fu to Yunnan Fu, and Tali Fu to Ningyuan, Fu I can easily imagine what the intermediate route is like. The journey by it occupies twenty-three days, as against twenty-one days by route (4).

Before entering Shang-kuan ("Upper Pass" ), which guards the northern approach to Tali Fu, the Thibetan

page 112

road, which joins the Ch'êngtu road to Thibet at Bathang, strikes the Tali Fu road. Of this road I know nothing, and will say nothing. It is the route followed by the Thibetans who flock to the fair which is held annually outside the west gate of Tali in the third Chinese moon.

*(6). The Bhamo route by way of Têngyüeh Chou and Yungch'ang Fu to Tali Fu.*

This journey has been so frequently described that it is probably the best known route to Yünnan. The difficulties of the road have been carefully pointed out; and those travellers who have performed the whole journey are agreed that these difficulties are a barrier to a swifter means of communication.

At present the journey between Tali Fu and Bhamo can be performed in some four-and-twenty days; and, as the result of inquiry at the former place and at Hsia-kuan, the great trade depôt of western Yünnan through which the highway passes a few miles to the south of Tali, I believe I am near the mark when I say that the total annual value of the trade between Bhamo and Tali amounts to about half a million sterling.

*(7). The Songkoi or Red River route to Southern Yünnan.*

Anyone wishing to obtain information regarding this important trade route to *Southern* Yünnan would do well to turn to the "China Review" for May and June, 1881, where he will find an interesting article, entitled "The Province of Yünnan," which contains a translation of the Trade Report for 1879 of Comte de Kergaradec, then Consul for France at Hanoi. In addition to careful statistics of the trade between Yünnan and Tonquin he will find desirable information regarding the navigation of the Songkoi. Here we are told that the total value of the trade between Yünnan and Hanoi during 1879 amounted to 3,225,000 francs, or £169,000 ; and that "in ordinary times thirty to forty days are occupied in the voyage from Hanoi to Lao-kai, and ten or twelve from Lao-kai to Man-hao."

If this river, as some French writers have asserted, is capable of steam navigation in its upper waters, it is

page 113

without doubt a very valuable trade route to Southern and South-eastern Yünnan. But these writers disagree as to how far it is navigable ; and M. Rocher, in his work " La Province Chinoise du Yünnan," says "There is every reason to believe that Lao-kai, considering the propinquity of Yünnan and Tonquin, will become the extreme point of steam navigation, and the entrepôt of Yünnan." If M. Rocher had said "the entrepôt of South-eastern Yunnan," we should have been disposed to agree with him ; but we cannot for a moment accept the conclusion that the trade of Western and Northern Yünnan would be affected by the opening of the Songkoi to steam navigation. Le Comte de Kergaradec sums up his Report in the following words: "In conclusion we are compelled to admit that under the most favourable circumstances, under conditions very different from those of to-day, the trade by the Red River could hardly attain a total of twenty million francs," say £800,000; but the writer of the article thinks that "if free access were obtainable *via* the Red River, the neighbouring provinces would also benefit, and take advantage of this outlet." I fear that those acquainted with the physical characteristics of Western China will think otherwise. But there is one point on which I wish to put this writer straight. He says in his next sentence, "Passengers from Yünnan might then reach the capital, Peking, in 30 days instead of 100 days, the time it now occupies *via* the Hankow route." By Yunnan I presume the provincial capital is meant, and by the " Hankow route " " the Tungt'ing lake and Yüan River route." Whether by this route, or by the Sui Fu or Luchou routes, passengers can in point of fact reach Peking from Yünnan Fu in less than half a hundred days.

(8). *The Canton and West River route to Yünnan.*

The West River is navigable by native craft from Canton to Pê-sê, a prefectural city in the west of the province of Kwangsi, whence goods are carried overland to Yünnan Fu. The journey by this route is long and tedious; but it has one advantage over the Yangtsze routes to Yünnan Fu, namely, that the overland journey from Pê-sê can be performed in several days less than by the Sui Fu or Luchou routes. But so far as foreign manufac-

page 114

tures are concerned, the Yangtsze routes at present do not compete with the Canton route to Yünnan Fu; they are more concerned with the supply of northern Yünnan. When steamers run to Lao-kai or Man-hao on the Songkoi, and to Ch'ungk'ing, Luchou and Sui Fu on the Upper Yangtsze, this trade route must inevitably suffer the fate of the once important trade route from Canton through Hunan to Ssü-ch'uan, which has, as I have already stated, become insignificant since the opening of the Lower Yangtsze to steam navigation.

(9). *The route to Yunnan by way of Kueiyang Fu.*

This route is too far from water communication to be of any importance. Yünnan Fu is distant twenty-one days' journey from Kueiyang Fu, whence another seven days are required to reach Chên-yüan Fu, which is, as I have already mentioned, the highest navigable point on the Yüan River. Kueiyang is also distant thirteen days from Yung-ning Hsien on the Yung-ning River, twelve days from the Ch'i-chiang River, and fifteen days from Ch'ungk'ing. The road from Kueiyang to Yünnan Fu, with the exception of the last five stages, is exceedingly mountainous and difficult, and the little trade there is consists principally of opium from Yünnan.

I have thus endeavoured briefly to point out the existing trade routes to Western China. I have not in a paper like the present entered into the details of trade, for they would fill a volume. Nor have I spoken of the attempts that have recently been made to find a trade route to South-western Yünnan. But the foreign merchant in China may rest assured that were a dozen trade routes to Western Yünnan found to-morrow they will not affect the Yangtze routes which supply Ssü-ch'uan, Kueichou, and Northern Yünnan. On the other hand, he may be assured that the present trade, great as it is, is capable of enormous expansion, and that the first step to ensure such expansion is to open the Upper Yangtze to steam navigation. Let not the words 'rapids' and 'gorges' dissuade him from the attempt.