

**HERBERT
ALLEN GILES**



**THE CIVILIZATION
OF CHINA**

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The Civilization of China

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PREFACE

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The aim of this work is to suggest a rough outline of Chinese civilization from the earliest times down to the present period of rapid and startling transition.

It has been written, primarily, for readers who know little or nothing of China, in the hope that it may succeed in alluring them to a wider and more methodical survey.

H.A.G.

Cambridge, May 12, 1911.

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CHAPTER I—THE FEUDAL AGE

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It is a very common thing now-a-days to meet people who are going to "China," which can be reached by the Siberian railway in fourteen or fifteen days. This brings us at once to the question—What is meant by the term China?

Taken in its widest sense, the term includes Mongolia, Manchuria, Eastern Turkestan, Tibet, and the Eighteen Provinces, the whole being equivalent to an area of some five million square miles, that is, considerably more than twice the size of the United States of America. But for a study of manners and customs and modes of thought of the Chinese people, we must confine ourselves to that portion of the whole which is known to the Chinese as the "Eighteen Provinces," and to us as China Proper. This portion of the empire occupies not quite two-fifths of the whole, covering an area of somewhat more than a million and a half square miles. Its chief landmarks may be roughly stated as Peking, the capital, in the north; Canton, the great commercial centre, in the south; Shanghai, on the east; and the Tibetan frontier on the west.

Any one who will take the trouble to look up these four points on a map, representing as they do central points on the four sides of a rough square, will soon realize the absurdity of asking a returning traveller the very much asked question, How do you like China? Fancy asking a Chinaman, who had spent a year or two in England, how he liked Europe! Peking, for instance, stands on the same parallel of latitude as Madrid; whereas Canton coincides similarly with Calcutta. Within the square indicated by the four points enumerated above will be found variations of climate, flowers, fruit, vegetables and animals—not to

mention human beings—distributed in very much the same way as in Europe. The climate of Peking is exceedingly dry and bracing; no rain, and hardly any snow, falling between October and April. The really hot weather lasts only for six or eight weeks, about July and August—and even then the nights are always cool; while for six or eight weeks between December and February there may be a couple of feet of ice on the river. Canton, on the other hand, has a tropical climate, with a long damp enervating summer and a short bleak winter. The old story runs that snow has only been seen once in Canton, and then it was thought by the people to be falling cotton-wool.

The northern provinces are remarkable for vast level plains, dotted with villages, the houses of which are built of mud. In the southern provinces will be found long stretches of mountain scenery, vying in loveliness with anything to be seen elsewhere. Monasteries are built high up on the hills, often on almost inaccessible crags; and there the well-to-do Chinaman is wont to escape from the fierce heat of the southern summer. On one particular mountain near Canton, there are said to be no fewer than one hundred of such monasteries, all of which reserve apartments for guests, and are glad to be able to add to their funds by so doing.

In the north of China, Mongolian ponies, splendid mules, and donkeys are seen in large quantities; also the two-humped camel, which carries heavy loads across the plains of Mongolia. In the south, until the advent of the railway, travellers had to choose between the sedan-chair carried on the shoulders of stalwart coolies, or the slower but more comfortable house-boat. Before steamers began to ply on the coast, a candidate for the doctor's degree at the great triennial examination would take three months to travel from Canton to Peking. Urgent dispatches, however, were often forwarded by relays of riders at the rate of two hundred miles a day.

The market in Peking is supplied, among other things, with excellent mutton from a fat-tailed breed of sheep, chiefly for the largely Mohammedan population; but the sheep will not live in southern China, where the goat takes its place. The pig is found everywhere, and represents beef in our market, the latter being extremely unpalatable to the ordinary Chinaman, partly perhaps because Confucius forbade men to slaughter the animal which draws the plough and contributes so much to the welfare of mankind. The staple food, the "bread" of the people in the Chinese Empire, is nominally rice; but this is too costly for the peasant of northern China to import, and he falls back on millet as its substitute. Apples, pears, grapes, melons, and walnuts grow abundantly in the north; the southern fruits are the banana, the orange, the pineapple, the mango, the pomelo, the lichee, and similar fruits of a more tropical character.

Cold storage has been practised by the Chinese for centuries. Blocks of ice are cut from the river for that purpose; and on a hot summer's day a Peking coolie can obtain an iced drink at an almost infinitesimal cost. Grapes are preserved from autumn until the following May and June by the simple process of sticking the stalk of the bunch into a large hard pear, and putting it away carefully in the ice-house. Even at Ningpo, close to our central point on the eastern coast of China, thin layers of ice are collected from pools and ditches, and successfully stored for use in the following summer.

The inhabitants of the coast provinces are distinguished from the dwellers in the north and in the far interior by a marked alertness of mind and general temperament. The Chinese themselves declare that virtue is associated with mountains, wisdom with water, cynically implying that no one is both virtuous and wise. Between the inhabitants of the various provinces there is little love lost. Northerners fear and hate southerners, and the latter hold the former in

infinite scorn and contempt. Thus, when in 1860 the Franco-British force made for Peking, it was easy enough to secure the services of any number of Cantonese, who remained as faithful as though the attack had been directed against some third nationality.

The population of China has never been exactly ascertained. It has been variously estimated by foreign travellers, Sacharoff, in 1842, placing the figure at over four hundred millions. The latest census, taken in 1902, is said to yield a total of four hundred and ten millions. Perhaps three hundred millions would be a juster estimate; even that would absorb no less than one-fifth of the human race. From this total it is easy to calculate that if the Chinese people were to walk past a given point in single file, the procession would never end; long before the last of the three hundred millions had passed by, a new generation would have sprung up to continue the neverending line. The census, however, is a very old institution with the Chinese; and we learn that in A.D. 156 the total population of the China of those days was returned as a little over fifty millions. In more modern times, the process of taking the census consists in serving out house-tickets to the head of every household, who is responsible for a proper return of all the inmates; but as there is no fixed day for which these tickets are returnable, the results are approximate rather than exact.

Again, it is not uncommon to hear people talking of the Chinese language as if it were a single tongue spoken all over China after a more or less uniform standard. But the fact is that the colloquial is broken up into at least eight dialects, each so strongly marked as to constitute eight languages as different to the ear, one from another, as English, Dutch and German, or French, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. A Shanghai man, for instance, is unintelligible to a Cantonese, and so on. All officials are obliged, and all of

the better educated merchants and others endeavour, if only for business purposes, to learn something of the dialect spoken at the court of Peking; and this is what is popularly known as "Mandarin." The written language remains the same for the whole empire; which merely means that ideas set down on paper after a uniform system are spoken with different sounds, just as the Arabic numerals are written uniformly in England, France and Germany, but are pronounced in a totally different manner.

The only difficulty of the spoken language, of no matter what dialect, lies in the "tones," which simply means the different intonations which may be given to one and the same sound, thus producing so many entirely different meanings. But for these tones, the colloquial of China would be absurdly easy, inasmuch as there is no such thing as grammar, in the sense of gender, number, case, mood, tense, or any of the variations we understand by that term. Many amusing examples are current of blunders committed by faulty speakers, such as that of the student who told his servant to bring him a goose, when what he really wanted was some salt, both goose and salt having the same sound, *yen*, but quite different intonations. The following specimen has the advantage of being true. A British official reported to the Foreign Office that the people of Tientsin were in the habit of shouting after foreigners, "Mao-tsu, mao-tsu" (pronounced *mowdza*, *ow* as in *how*), from which he gathered that they were much struck by the head-gear of the barbarian. Now, it is a fact that *mao-tsu*, uttered with a certain intonation, means a hat; but with another intonation, it means "hairy one," and the latter, referring to the big beards of foreigners, was the meaning intended to be conveyed. This epithet is still to be heard, and is often preceded by the adjective "red."

The written characters, known to have been in use for the past three thousand years, were originally rude pictures, as

of men, birds, horses, dogs, houses, the numerals (one, two, three, four), etc., etc., and it is still possible to trace in the modified modern forms of these characters more or less striking resemblances to the objects intended. The next step was to put two or more characters together, to express by their combination an abstract idea, as, for instance, a *hand* holding a *rod* = father; but of course this simple process did not carry the Chinese very far, and they soon managed to hit on a joint picture and phonetic system, which enabled them to multiply characters indefinitely, new compounds being formed for use as required. It is thus that new characters can still be produced, if necessary, to express novel objects or ideas. The usual plan, however, is to combine existing terms in such a way as to suggest what is wanted. For instance, in preference to inventing a separate character for the piece of ordnance known as a "mortar," the Chinese, with an eye to its peculiar pose, gave it the appropriate name of a "frog gun."

Again, just as the natives and the dialects of the various parts of China differ one from another, although fundamentally the same people and the same language, so do the manners and customs differ to such an extent that habits of life and ceremonial regulations which prevail in one part of the empire do not necessarily prevail in another. Yet once more it will be found that the differences which appear irreconcilable at first, do not affect what is essential, but apply rather to matters of detail. Many travellers and others have described as customs of the Chinese customs which, as presented, refer to a part of China only, and not to the whole. For instance, the ornamental ceremonies connected with marriage vary in different provinces; but there is a certain ceremony, equivalent in one sense to signing the register, which is almost essential to every marriage contract. Bride and bridegroom must kneel down and call God to witness; they also pledge each other in wine

from two cups joined together by a red string. Red is the colour for joy, as white is the colour for mourning. Chinese note-paper is always ruled with red lines or stamped with a red picture. One Chinese official who gave a dinner-party in foreign style, even went so far as to paste a piece of red paper on to each dinner-napkin, in order to counteract the unpropitious influence of white.

Reference has been made above to journeys performed by boat. In addition to the Yangtze and the Yellow River or Hoang ho (pronounced *Hwong haw*), two of the most important rivers in the world, China is covered with a network of minor streams, which in southern China form the chief lines of transport. The Yangtze is nothing more than a huge navigable river, crossing China Proper from west to east. The Yellow River, which, with the exception of a great loop to the north, runs on nearly parallel lines of latitude, has long been known as "China's Sorrow," and has been responsible for enormous loss of life and property. Its current is so swift that ordinary navigation is impossible, and to cross it in boats is an undertaking of considerable difficulty and danger. It is so called from the yellowness of its water, caused by the vast quantity of mud which is swept down by its rapid current to the sea; hence, the common saying, "When the Yellow River runs clear," as an equivalent of the Greek Kalends. The huge embankments, built to confine it to a given course, are continually being forced by any unusual press of extra water, with enormous damage to property and great loss of life, and from time to time this river has been known to change its route altogether, suddenly diverging, almost at a right angle. Up to the year 1851 the mouth of the river was to the south of the Shantung promontory, about lat. 34 N.; then, with hardly any warning, it began to flow to the north-east, finding an outlet to the north of the Shantung promontory, about lat. 38 N.

A certain number of connecting links have been formed between the chief lines of water communication, in the shape of artificial cuttings; but there is nothing worthy the name of canal except the rightly named Grand Canal, called by the Chinese the "river of locks," or alternatively the "transport river," because once used to convey rice from the south to Peking. This gigantic work, designed and executed in the thirteenth century by the Emperor Kublai Khan, extended to about six hundred and fifty miles in length, and completed an almost unbroken water communication between Peking and Canton. As a wonderful engineering feat it is indeed more than matched by the famous Great Wall, which dates back to a couple of hundred years before Christ, and which has been glorified as the last trace of man's handiwork on the globe to fade from the view of an imaginary person receding into space. Recent exploration shows that this wall is about eighteen hundred miles in length, stretching from a point on the seashore somewhat east of Peking, to the northern frontier of Tibet. Roughly speaking, it is twenty-two feet in height by twenty feet in breadth; at intervals of a hundred yards are towers forty feet high, the whole being built originally of brick, of which in some parts but mere traces now remain. Nor is this the only great wall; ruins of other walls on a considerable scale have lately been brought to light, the object of all being one and the same—to keep back the marauding Tartars.

Over the length and breadth of their boundless empire, with all its varying climates and inhabitants, the Chinese people are free to travel, for business or pleasure, at their own sweet will, and to take up their abode at any spot without let or hindrance. No passports are required; neither is any ordinary citizen obliged to possess other papers of identification. Chinese inns are not exposed to the annoyance of domiciliary visits with reference to their clients for the time being; and so long as the latter pay their way,

and refrain from molesting others, they will usually be free from molestation themselves. The Chinese, however, are not fond of travelling; they love their homes too well, and they further dread the inconveniences and dangers attached to travel in many other parts of the world. Boatmen, carters, and innkeepers have all of them bad reputations for extortionate charges; and the traveller may sometimes happen upon a "black inn," which is another name for a den of thieves. Still there have been many who travelled for the sake of beautiful scenery, or in order to visit famous spots of historical interest; not to mention the large body of officials who are constantly on the move, passing from post to post.

Among those who believe that every nation must have reached its present quarters from some other distant parts of the world, must be reckoned a few students of the ancient history of China. Coincidences in language and in manners and customs, mostly of a shadowy character, have led some to suggest Babylonia as the region from which the Chinese migrated to the land where they are now found. The Chinese possess authentic records of an indisputably early past, but throughout these records there is absolutely no mention, not even a hint, of any migration of the kind.

Tradition places the Golden Age of China so far back as three thousand years before Christ; for a sober survey of China's early civilization, it is not necessary to push further back than the tenth century B.C. We shall find evidence of such an advanced state of civilization at that later date as to leave no doubt of a very remote antiquity.

The China of those days, known even then as the Middle Kingdom, was a mere patch on the empire of to-day. It lay, almost lozenge-shaped, between the 34th and 40th parallels of latitude north, with the upper point of the lozenge resting on the modern Peking, and the lower on Si-an Fu in Shensi, whither the late Empress Dowager fled for

safety during the Boxer rising in 1900. The ancient autocratic Imperial system had recently been disestablished, and a feudal system had taken its place. The country was divided up into a number of vassal states of varying size and importance, ruled each by its own baron, who swore allegiance to the sovereign of the Royal State. The relations, however, which came to subsist, as time went on, between these states, sovereign and vassal alike, as described in contemporary annals, often remind the reader of the relations which prevailed between the various political divisions of ancient Greece. The rivalries of Athens and Sparta, whose capitals were only one hundred and fifty miles apart—though a perusal of Thucydides makes one feel that at least half the world was involved—find their exact equivalent in the jealousies and animosities which stirred the feudal states of ancient China, and in the disastrous campaigns and bloody battles which the states fought with one another. We read of chariots and horsemanship; of feats of arms and deeds of individual heroism; of forced marches, and of night attacks in which the Chinese soldier was gagged with a kind of wooden bit, to prevent talking in the ranks; of territory annexed and reconquered, and of the violent deaths of rival rulers by poison or the dagger of the assassin.

When the armies of these states went into battle they formed a line, with the bowmen on the left and the spearmen on the right flank. The centre was occupied by chariots, each drawn by either three or four horses harnessed abreast. Swords, daggers, shields, iron-headed clubs some five to six feet in length and weighing from twelve to fifteen pounds, huge iron hooks, drums, cymbals, gongs, horns, banners and streamers innumerable, were also among the equipment of war. Beacon-fires of wolves' dung were lighted to announce the approach of an enemy and summon the inhabitants to arms. Quarter was rarely if