

Introduction

This volume treats of the vegetation and geographic phase of the western part of Kan-su province and of the eastern and northeastern part of the province of Ch'ing-hai, the only region where forests occur and where plant growth is richer than elsewhere in these two provinces.

Of Kan-su, the area included commences at the border of Ssu-ch'uan north of Ching-ch'üan, a little west of the 105° meridian and north of the 32°30' parallel, and extends to the 102° meridian in the south, to the 100° in the northwest, and 39° parallel in the north.

That of Ch'ing-hai begins with the 34° parallel in the south to the 103° meridian (but not in an even line as that meridian crosses parts of Kan-su) to the 39° parallel in the north and 99° meridian in the west.

The richest botanical region of Kan-su and scenically the most beautiful, even of the whole of China, is without question the Min Shan in the south, and Lien-hua Shan north of it, both composed mainly of limestone. North of the latter the flora is poor, as the area is arid and becomes more so as the borders of Inner Mongolia are approached.

Of the Kan-su area in question that comprising the Min Shan to south of Sung-p'an in northwest Szechuan, has not only been mapped for the first time but also explored botanically in its entirety.

Previous botanical explorations were confined to the southeasternmost point (Farrer & Purdom), while other travelers simply passed over its eastern end.

Of Ch'ing-hai a considerable area was unexplored and this was mapped and combed botanically for the first time; I refer to the area of the gorges of the Yellow River, east and west, from the bend in the south to north of the Gyü-par range, and all the intervening grasslands. The region of the Am-nye Ma-chhen, and the western half of the Gyü-par Range the only part where forests occur and which are of botanical interest.

In the far north the Koko Nor, Potanin range and the extreme northern ranges of the Nan Shan system which include the Ch'ih-lien and T'o-lai ranges were crossed in several places and botanically explored but mainly for ligneous plants.

The exploration of all these regions which lasted from the spring of 1925 to spring 1927 were undertaken for the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University and the Museum of Comparative Zoology of the same university, the first receiving all the botanical material including all the many seeds, of both ligneous and herbaceous plants, and the latter the birds numbering nearly 2,000 specimens.¹ Reports on these collections have been published by the said University.

The expedition started from Haiphong in Indochina by rail to K'un-ming, capital of Yün-nan, and thence by mule caravan across the whole of West China to the southwestern border of the Gobi desert. For the exploration of the different regions 60 yak, 14 horses and 18 camels as well as 40 mules were employed at one time or another depending on the mode of travel in vogue in the different parts. My assistants comprised 12 Na-khi from Li-chiang in northwest Yün-nan who joined me in K'un-ming, Yün-nan, whence we started in December 1924

¹ Outram Bangs and James L. Peters: Birds collected by Dr. Joseph Rock in Western Kansu and Eastern Tibet. *Bulletin of the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard College* 68.1928, 311-381.

The photographs were all taken by the author and some of the section maps here reproduced for the first time were made by him. Other maps like those of the Yellow River and the region between La-brang (Hsia Ho) and the Am-nye Ma-chhen were made with the cooperation of the late W. E. Simpson.

Thanks are rendered to the Royal Horticultural Society and its President Lord Aberconway², for the interest taken, and to the officers of the National Geographic Society of Washington D.C., who generously made the prints which illustrate this volume.

London, England September 1952

J. F. Rock

² Henry Duncan McLaren, 1879-1953, 2nd baron Aberconway, British politician, horticulturist industrialist. He inherited Bodnant and deloped its garden; he was particularly fond of breeding rhododendrons and magnolias.