



Bridges in the Clouds, Rain in the Gorges

Japanese travelers of the early Meiji era were not restricted to those who journeyed to Europe and America. For the first time in centuries the Japanese were able to visit China. The ships bearing missions from Japan to Europe often stopped in Shanghai, and the diaries kept by the members of the missions recorded impressions of a country that was far more familiar to the Japanese than anywhere in the West; but China also sometimes seemed shockingly unlike the idealized picture that had been created in their minds by the works they had read of Chinese literature, history, and philosophy.

The appeal of China was particularly strong among samurai who had received extensive training in the Chinese classics. The experience of visiting sites associated with the martial and literary heroes known from childhood was categorically different for them from the interest of visiting George Washington's house or the tomb of Napoleon; these sites were not simply curiosities but confirmed special ties with the sources of samurai culture.

Among the Japanese who kept diaries describing their travels in China, Takezoe Shin'ichirō (1842-1917) is often credited with having created a masterpiece of the travel diary. His diary, written in *kam-*

bun (prose in Chinese), *San'un Kyōu Nikki* (Diary of Bridges in the Clouds, Rain in the Gorges), describes a journey made in 1876 from Peking to Chungking, then down the Yangtze River to Shanghai. The journey took 110 days. Takezoe was accompanied by a Japanese, Tsuda Seiichi, and a Chinese whom he refers to as Chih-hsin.¹

Takezoe was born into a learned samurai family in Kumamōto and received an orthodox education under Confucian scholars. He served the Kumamoto clan, and in 1868 made a trip to Shanghai to arrange for repairs to a steamship bought by the clan. After the Meiji Restoration he entered the diplomatic service and was assigned in 1875 as the secretary of the Japanese Legation in Peking, where he served under the celebrated diplomat and advocate of Western thought Mori Arinori (1847–1889). In his diary Takezoe recalled how reports he heard there of the wonders of the scenery in Szechuan had filled him with the desire to see the sights with his own eyes.² He undoubtedly knew two accounts of travel in Szechuan by Chinese of the Sung dynasty, Lu Yu and Fan Ch'eng-ta. His post in Peking gave Takezoe the opportunity to make the journey. He was the first Japanese to visit Szechuan since the monk and poet Sesson Yūbai early in the fourteenth century.

When, some 550 years after Sesson, Takezoe left Peking to set out on his journey, he recalled these lines by the poet Chia Tao (779–843):

*Now, when unexpectedly I cross the Sang-kan again,
And look off at Ping-chou, I think, "That is my home."*

Chia-Tao while living in Ping-chou had yearned to be back in his hometown of Hsien-yang, but after ten years in Ping-chou he realized, as he crossed the Sang-kan River to go to still another post, that Ping-chou was now his home. These were the same lines that had inspired Bashō to write at the opening of his *Nozarashi Kikō* (Exposed in the Fields),

aki totose	Autumn makes ten years;
kaette Edo wo	Now I really mean Edo
sasu kokyō	When I talk of "home." ³

Takezoe had resided in Peking for less than a year, but the thought of leaving behind Japanese friends who would help him if he fell ill or console him if he was depressed, and of setting forth with only one Japanese companion into an unknown land, made him feel the same emotions that Chia Tao and Bashō had felt long before.

On May 7, 1876, Takezoe and his companions crossed the Pao River and entered An-hsien district. From here on westward, he wrote, rice was not grown and people ate wheat. It was upsetting for Japanese not to be able to get rice when they traveled in America and Europe, but it was probably even more unsettling to be in the same Orient and still not get rice. But this was only the first of the problems that beset Takezoe on his way to Szechuan.

The next day, between T'ang-hsien and Pao-t'ing, they were surrounded by a mob of beggars along the road. Takezoe likened their voices, begging for alms, to autumn cicadas singing in the trees, a more poetic description than the one other Japanese travelers to the West gave to the jabbering of the beggars they encountered. An even more vexing problem was the blinding dust from the road, whipped by the hot winds. The two Japanese, riding in a cart, wrapped themselves in blankets to protect themselves. When they reached their destination, they looked at the driver of the cart: his dark face had turned white and only his eyes glared darkly. "He looked so much like a demon that we had to laugh."⁴

On the ninth they reached Hsin-lo district, a place so desolate that the land could not be cultivated. Takezoe wrote that the people sustained themselves on a kind of gruel they made from grain mixed with leaves from the elm, camellia, and date trees they grew. Others, he says, ate nothing but leaves. It is hard to take this as literal truth,

though he was describing what he had actually seen, but there is no reason to doubt his statement that, because the region lacked firewood or charcoal, people dug roots for fuel and used dried horse dung in place of charcoal. Takezoe recalled that when he spent a winter in Shantung, the smell on the *kang* where he slept was so terrible that he asked what caused it. They were burning horse dung.⁵

Whenever possible, the Japanese left their inn before daybreak in order to avoid the dust stirred up along the roads by other people. On the thirteenth they crossed what Takezoe called a "sand river."⁶ The river bottom was absolutely dry, and when they attempted to cross it by cart, the sand swallowed up the wheels, and they could not extricate the cart even with the help of three horses. Only after they had hired a fourth horse could the cart at last be pulled up on the opposite bank of the dried-up river. That night they spent in Han-tan (Kantán). There was a carefully tended shrine to Lu-sheng (Rosei), but nothing to remind them of the story (familiar to every educated Japanese of the time) in which Rosei slept on a magic pillow at the inn in Han-tan and lived in his dream a whole lifetime during the few minutes while his meal was being prepared.

The inns where the Japanese spent the nights were extremely primitive. For about a month after they left Peking there were no facilities for bathing and, as Takezoe reported when at last he was able to bathe again, his face and body were caked with grease and dirt, and the odor made him nauseous.⁷ One night, when he got up and lit the lamp, the sound of flies buzzing in his room was like that of water boiling. He recalled that a Chinese poet had once mistaken the sound for the crowing of cocks, and he commented, "It was not without reason."⁸

Despite the many hardships of travel in China, there is no suggestion in Takezoe's diary that he wished he had not been so foolhardy as to make the overland journey from Peking to Chungking. Wherever he went there were mementoes of the Chinese past he knew so well. Sometimes, as when the travelers passed the native place of Han Wei-kung (1008–1075), there was only a small shrine in

the fields to commemorate the man, but Takezoe was thoroughly familiar with the achievements of this scholar and statesman, and the knowledge made even an insignificant place seem memorable.

At other places the monuments were more impressive. When the Japanese reached T'ang-yin-hsien they admired the splendid mausoleum where Yüeh Fei (1103–1141), the brilliant general, was worshipped. Yüeh Fei, born the son of a tenant farmer of Han Wei-kung, had risen from the ranks to lead the Southern Sung army that in 1141 defeated the invading Chin army. Han Wei-kung was remembered now only by an inconspicuous shrine, but Yüeh Fei was idolized as a savior of the country. Takezoe described the rooftop tiles, beautifully carved in various shapes, soaring above the green trees of a grove. Stone monuments with carved inscriptions stood in rows in all four cardinal directions. Takezoe, admiring the calligraphy of the inscriptions, declared that he could tell the characters of the writers from their handwriting.

Outside the gate of the mausoleum Takezoe saw the statues of Ch'in Kuei (1090–1155) and his wife and another of Chang Chun (1086–1154) with his hands tied behind his back. Ch'in Kuei and Chang Chun had opposed Yüeh Fei's policy of resisting the Chin invaders and entered into negotiations with them. Yüeh Fei was thrown into prison and later killed there. For this reason, people passing the statues outside the gate invariably spat on them. But, Takezoe reasoned, if Kao Tsung (the first emperor of the Southern Sung dynasty) had not intended to kill Yüeh Fei, not even a hundred Ch'in Kueis could have vented their poison in this way; therefore, the murderer of Yüeh Fei was not Ch'in Kuei but Emperor Kao Tsung.⁹

None of the Japanese who visited the West possessed this kind of knowledge about the countries they saw. Even a modicum of knowledge of European history would have given to Cairo or Lisbon an allure that no Japanese felt. Takezoe, traveling under conditions that were infinitely worse than any experienced by Japanese who visited the West, probably derived more pleasure from his travels than they. Sometimes he was fascinated by an old inscription, sometimes in-

trigued by different possible interpretations of well-known historical facts. Nothing he saw from the past was without interest.

However, historical associations could not completely blot out the extreme discomfort to which Takezoe was subjected. One night he woke from dreams to hear a noise like that of a waterfall. He investigated, and discovered it was made by donkeys chewing hay. He commented, "I understood for the first time the aptness of the line, 'From my bed I hear the scrawny horses chewing the remains of the hay.'"¹⁰ At inns in northern China the rooms for guests were separated from the stable by only a thin partition, and the neighing of horses or the braying of donkeys sounded as if they came from the traveler's pillow.

On May 19 Takezoe and his companions saw bamboo for the first time since leaving Peking seventeen days earlier. The sight of fresh green leaves after the dusty desolation through which they had been traveling made Takezoe wonder if the miserable conditions were not the fault of the people themselves. If they had devoted their energies to planting and cultivating trees, there would soon be forests, and wood would be plentiful. The wood could be used to build more substantial houses than the mud dwellings characteristic of the region, eliminating the nuisance of weeds sprouting from the walls or of the houses crumbling in a rainstorm. The branches could also be used for firewood in place of horse manure or roots.¹¹

Takezoe's unquestionable admiration for Chinese culture did not blind him to the sorry state of Chinese society at the time. The worst feature was the widespread consumption of opium, which seemed to grow more conspicuous at each successive stage of the journey. In the areas north and south of the Yellow River everyone planted opium, and the farther west one went, the more opium one saw. Takezoe declared that in the region where he was traveling, all the local people smoked it. In Shan-hsi province seven out of ten, men and women alike, smoked opium. The annual cost of the opium consumed by each person, he calculated, was not less than twenty gold pieces. The

population of China was said to be four hundred million; so even if only one-tenth of the population smoked and only one-fortieth smoked the more expensive imported opium, the annual expenditure would come to ten million pieces of gold. Takezoe reasoned,

If smoking were good for the body, the expense would be worth it. Or, if it did neither good nor bad, perhaps it might not be worth worrying over. But it is in the nature of opium to consume the energies of the smoker and shorten his life. This poison is worse than venom. I fear that in another one hundred years' time the four hundred millions of China will be utterly enervated and the race will approach extinction. The father and mother of the people [i.e., the emperor] should take measures as soon as possible.¹²

Chinese food eaten along the way also depressed Takezoe. After leaving the ancient capital of Lo-yang, the Japanese stopped at Tzu-hsien. They asked for rice, only to be told there wasn't any. The people of this part of the country ate wheat, which they made into dumplings or buns. Even if they had rice, all they did was to remove the husks, then store it until it rotted, smelled, and produced insects. "Soup is made by boiling pieces of pork in oil. They also boil in oil pepper, onions, and garlic. None of it is fit to be eaten."¹³ And, of course, it was not unusual to suffer from stomach pains or diarrhea.¹⁴ It is a tribute to Takezoe that he did not allow these personal discomforts to alter his basic love of China and its culture.

The worst misery Takezoe experienced in China was caused by the total lack of even elementary comforts in the inns. In general, he informs us, Chinese inns provided nothing more than a place to sleep. Travelers had to bring their own bedding. Worse, "in the north there are no toilets. People all do their business in pigpens. The pigs always make this their meals. If somebody goes there, the pigs joyfully assemble around his behind, and no matter how hard he tries to

drive them away, they won't leave. It is really unbearable."¹⁵ The first place the Japanese encountered toilets was Hsi-an-fu. The toilets were dirty, but they were better than nothing.

The first place where they could bathe after leaving Peking were the Li-shan Hot Springs, the site of the Ch'ing-hua Palace of a thousand years before. Takezoe wrote that he felt marvelous after bathing. Even quite ordinary comforts assume great importance when one travels under such conditions. And, of course (though Takezoe did not bother to mention the fact until he had completed the journey), he was tormented every night by bedbugs, which the Chinese called "stink bugs" (*chou-chung*), an evocative name. At first, until he got used to their presence at every inn where he spent the night, he could not sleep.¹⁶

It is interesting to compare Takezoe's impressions of China with the roughly contemporaneous account of Japan by the intrepid Englishwoman Isabella Bird (1831-1904), who traveled in the summer of 1878 (just two years after Takezoe's journey to Szechuan) from "Yedo to Yezo," shunning most of the principal cities along the way in favor of "unbeaten tracks." Here is her description of an inn at Kuruma-tōge, near Nojiri in the mountains of central Japan: "I found nothing that I could eat except black beans and boiled cucumbers. The room was dark, dirty, vile, noisy, and poisoned by sewage odours, as rooms unfortunately are very apt to be."¹⁷

And here is her description of Japanese of the region: "These people wear no linen, and their clothes, which are seldom washed, are constantly worn, night and day, as long as they will hold together¹⁸ . . . The persons of the people, especially of the children, are infested with vermin, and one fruitful source of skin sores is the irritation arising from this cause . . . The married women look as if they have never known youth, and their skin is apt to be like tanned leather. At Kayashima I asked the house-master's wife, who looked about fifty, how old she was (a polite question in Japan), and she replied twenty-two—one of many similar surprises."¹⁹

Isabella Bird was far from being excessively critical of conditions

in the places she visited. Later in her journey she declared, "Considering that I have often put up in small hamlets off the great routes even of Japanese travel, the accommodation, minus the fleas and the odours, has been surprisingly excellent, not to be equalled, I should think, in equally remote regions in any country in the world."²⁰

She was also ready to praise the Japanese landscapes, as in this description: "It was a lovely summer day, though hot, and the snowy peaks of Aidzu scarcely looked cool as they glittered in the sunlight. The plain of Yonezawa, with the prosperous town of Yonezawa in the south, and the frequented watering-place of Akayu in the north, is a perfect garden of Eden."²¹

Takezoe, after enduring the hardships of inns along the way, would also be rewarded by magnificent scenery when he at last reached Szechuan.

On June 9 Takezoe and his companions reached the first goal of their journey, the *sandō* at I-men-chen. A *sandō* (like a *kakehashi* in Japan) was a narrow path, resembling a ledge, built of wood planks along the side of a precipitous cliff. (As far as I know, there is nothing like a *sandō* in the West, and for that reason I have translated it as "bridge" in the title of Takezoe's diary.) By extension, it came to mean any dangerous path through spectacularly steep mountains. Bashō wrote of the *kakehashi* in Kiso:

kakehashi ya	Bridge along the cliff—
inochi wo karamu	Clinging for their very lives
tsuta momiji	Ivy and maple leaves.

The *sandō* in China were even more frightening, judging by Takezoe's description:

Mountain torrents issue from the numberless mountains, and strangely shaped rocks stand in ranks. We crossed a moun-

tain torrent to tread the perilous opposite shore. The narrow path twists around the side of the mountain, and when one looks up at the sky it is as from the bottom of a well. Two *li* farther on we crossed through a barrier, the ancient Ta-san Barrier. The mountains grew ever steeper and the path ever more dangerous. A thousand fathoms below was a gulch with a fiercely raging torrent that made a noise like thunder and was shaped like a cloud. We had descended some ten *li* from the barrier when suddenly a downpour rained on us like cannon balls. We got down from our sedan chairs and rested for a while.²²

The mountains, for all their dangers, were more congenial to the Japanese than the dusty plains. Takezoe noted nostalgically that the mountain people made things of wood that looked like the souvenirs sold at Hakone. The green of the mountains and the bright color of the rhododendrons and other flowers made the place seem (to use Isabella Bird's word) like another Eden. A Taoist priest invited them into a temple building where the Japanese were treated to tea and food. Behind the building, a flight of stone steps with a carved stone balustrade led up to the top of the mountain. Takezoe wrote, "There are pines and bamboo, the green mingling among the blue, absolutely pure, without a particle of dust. We wandered here and there for a long time, the feeling of dustiness suddenly evaporated. This is truly a wondrous place of purity."²³

The next day the Japanese reached the point of confluence of the Hsia and Pao Rivers, and saw the ruins of San-chiao-cheng. Before long, they crossed another river in a small boat, and reached Wu-ch'u-p'u. Takezoe wrote, "Cascades in the mountains pour down with a never-ending roar, and the blowing wind raises spray like scattered jewels. The water of the Pao, collecting in pools, is an indigo blue, and where it surges over rocks seems to be throwing off snow. In its course are weird boulders and strange rocks, some like coiled dragons, others like wild horses, lie beside the waves. And the *sandō*

threads its way through all this. This part of the journey was like traveling through a painting."²⁴

Still farther on was the Thousand Buddha Cliff. Here the *sandō* had been constructed in the T'ang dynasty by a man who had also carved images of Buddha along the sides of the cliff. Later, many other men added sculptures of Buddha, in every posture and with every expression. In the Ch'ien-lung era (1739-1795) a farmer who was cultivating the mountainside found over twenty stones that seemed to have supernatural origins. He reported this to the authorities, and an official subsequently raised funds to build a temple in which the stones were worshiped. Takezoe, a good Confucianist, was enraged by this act of what he considered to be deluded piety: "It is forgivable for ignorant people to be superstitious, but what does it mean when an official promotes such nonsense?"²⁵

Beyond Thousand Buddha Cliff the dangerous part of the *sandō* came to an end. While traveling in the dusty flatlands Takezoe had feared that when they reached the *sandō* in Szechuan they would have to make their way through dense forests where tigers and panthers roamed, and that it would be impossible to get any decent food to eat; but they discovered that the lands between the mountains were cultivated, and there were even rice paddies. Beans and wheat had been planted in every cranny of the cliffs, and wherever they went they could hear the sounds of chickens and dogs, the traditional sounds of a peaceful Chinese village. Oxen and sheep were so numerous they blocked the roads. At dangerous places along the way steps had been cut into the cliffs and there was even a railing to help the traveler. The cities they passed were thriving, and the inns excellent. An uninterrupted stream of palanquins went by day and night. Even in the small towns along the road the food was delicious, and the inns were prepared to accommodate guests with comfort. Takezoe commented, "Ah, there is always something one couldn't have guessed in the things of this world."²⁶

On July 2 Takezoe and his companions arrived in Ch'eng-tu. The following day Takezoe visited an antique shop. He declared that

there was nothing worth looking at, whether calligraphy, paintings, or antiques. But there were bookshops everywhere, and the shelves were full of books. Takezoe remarked, "One can tell this is a place where literature has flourished."²⁷

The last part of Takezoe's journey, from Ch'eng-tu to Chungking, then down the Yangtze to Shanghai, was made in relative comfort. For the first time Takezoe mentions having met a Chinese with a background similar to his own, the scholar Ch'en Hsi-ch'ang, whom he met in Ch'eng-tu and who accompanied the Japanese as far as Chungking. Ch'en told Takezoe about the anti-Christian riots in Chungking. Churches and hospitals associated with them had been burned, and the rioters had not been satisfied until they had destroyed every last church.²⁸ In the regions of China through which Takezoe had passed, life was so hard that people could think of little else but obtaining food and firewood, but here they had the leisure to be stirred by ideology.

Takezoe's diary is a polished example of literary *kambun*. He also published a companion volume of *kanshi* composed on the journey. Both in prose and poetry he so vividly captured the experiences of his journey that his work has been admired in China as well as in Japan.

Notes

1. This seems to be his personal name only and not his full name.
2. Yonaiyama Tsuneo, *Nyūshokki*, p. 263.
3. See my *Travelers of a Hundred Ages*, p. 292.
4. Yonaiyama, *Nyūshokki*, p. 267.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 268. A *kang* is a kind of earthen platform under which a low fire is kept burning to warm the person sleeping above.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 276. There is another, even more impressive shrine to Yüeh Fei in Hangchou.

10. *Ibid.* I have not been able to identify the quotation.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 279–80.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 285–86.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 296.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, p. 353.
17. Isabella L. Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Old Japan*, p. 93.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
22. Yonaiyama, *Nyūshokki*, p. 301.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 305.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 323.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 329.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 350.

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