

# Alexander Wylie's Travels on Shu Roads in 1867<sup>1</sup>

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(Updates on Itinerary in April 2013 & 2015)

## Introduction

Alexander Wylie (1815-1887) (Chinese name: Weilie Yali 伟烈 亚力) was a British Protestant Missionary who spent many years in China and was well-known for his Chinese language skill and scholarship. He seems to have had a similar approach to Walter Medhurst and others in that he mastered Chinese language and literature (Wylie, 1867a) and put particular effort into translating English into Chinese language books. He also wrote articles in Chinese containing "Useful Knowledge" such as mathematics, astronomy and engineering. This approach reasoned that only when Chinese had modernised would they become fully receptive to the Christian Gospel. He is also well-known for his collected biographies of Missionaries to China (Wylie, 1867b) and (well before Joseph Needham) bringing to the attention of the west the advanced state of Chinese science and mathematics in the past.

After China had been opened by the Opium Wars, Wylie was active in finding out as much as possible about the interior of China. After 1860, the Taiping rebellion had been extinguished and the most unequal of the "Unequal Treaties", the "Treaty of Tien-tsin", (Tienjin, 天津条约) had been signed in 1858 and was gradually coming into force. The Treaty established foreign legations in Beijing; unlimited access for foreign vessels to the Yangtze River; foreigners to travel into the interior for travel, trade and missionary activities; Chinese to be Christian if they wished and various other things such as payment of a large amount of money, legalisation of the Opium Trade etc. Following this treaty, the Yangtze River was open to traders, gunboats and missionaries. Hankou (汉口) in Hubei, where the Han River joined the Yangtze, became a centre of British interest with a naval presence and grew to become a well-established foreign concession with a number of nations in residence. From here shallow draft steamboats later moved through the Yangtze gorges into Sichuan following the explorations of Thomas Blakiston (Blakiston, 1862) from Hankou to the meeting of the Yangtze and Min Rivers. Anticipating a commercial boom, merchants were keen to know as much as possible about China's interior and its access routes via whatever roads and rivers could be used to transport goods. It was in this environment that in 1868, Missionaries Alexander Wylie and Griffith John made an adventurous journey beyond the current reach of steamboats on the Yangtze and on to Chengdu (成都) along the Min River (Wylie, 1868). They then went by road north to Hanzhong (汉中) and back to the Yangtze at the Hankou settlement via the Han River (汉水) Valley. The way back to Hankou from Hanzhong was achieved mostly by boat on navigable sections of the Han River. Wylie and John were clearly looking for pathways by which missionary, mercantile and military groups could move into and

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<sup>1</sup> This document can also be found at the Qinling Plank Roads to Shu [Web Site](#) and also has a web page providing access to it and other supporting materials [HERE](#).

through China's interior. Their activities, motives and sources of support were similar to those of the German explorer Ferdinand von Richthofen who travelled to this area from the Wei River valley (north of the Qinling Mountains) in 1869-1870.

Alexander Wylie, after a brief outline summary of the route from Hankou to Chengdu (separately presented in expanded form in Wylie, 1868), recorded his northern journey from Chengdu to Hankou via Hanzhong in a learned paper presented to the Royal Geographical Society of London (Wylie, 1869). The paper was well written, full of useful information for the time – and is still of use today. Of particular importance to the study of the Shu Roads (蜀道), he travelled the Jinniu (Golden Ox, 金牛道) Road and a small part of the Northern Plank (北棧) road to reach Hanzhong from Chengdu. After that, he took some alternative paths overland and made use of navigable sections of the Han River to go past present day Ankang Xian (安康县 then called Xing'an Fu, 興安府) and back to the safety of British Hankou. It is clear from reading his paper that a primary objective was to obtain revised and new information about the river systems and that he had a keen interest in the river trade and traffic he came across. But he also followed and accurately described ancient highways of the west of China known as the “Shu Roads” (as described generally in English language in Jupp, 2008 and Justman, 2007) and also the towns and villages along them in some detail.

Ferdinand von Richthofen, in his English language letters of 1870-72 (von Richthofen, 1877; written to inform eager merchants of the resources and infrastructure awaiting them in China's interior) directs his readers to Wylie's paper for a description of the Jinniu Road rather than re-create its detail from his own notes. Herold Wiens (Wiens, 1949a, 1949b) also makes extensive use of both von Richthofen's works (Wiens was fluent in German) and Wylie's paper to create his composite description of the southern main Shu road. An advantage of using Wiens' collation is that he uses the (then) standard Wade-Giles transliteration for names although his summary is not as detailed as the original texts. The same advantage applies to using the clear and precise account of travel over this route by Teichman (1921), whose use of Wade-Giles is standard and precise. Both texts were used along with maps and field visits to help identify locations on Wylie's route.<sup>2</sup>

The detailed journey recorded in the paper started at Chengdu. Wylie was impressed by Chengdu, writing: “The provincial city of Ching-too is one of the largest in the empire, and has some streets equal, if not superior, to any that I have seen elsewhere. Extensive warehouses abound, both in the city and suburbs. The shops are well stocked; almost every commodity is to be found, and English, French and Russian goods are no rarity. ... Like many cities in China, Ching-too can boast a very respectable antiquity, and during the third century of our era it was the site of the imperial residence. The only description we have of the city by any European is that of Marco Polo, whose brief, but graphic, account might, with slight modification, answer very well to its condition at the present day, although he portrays a state of things six centuries past”. Chengdu today is even more impressive and it is possible

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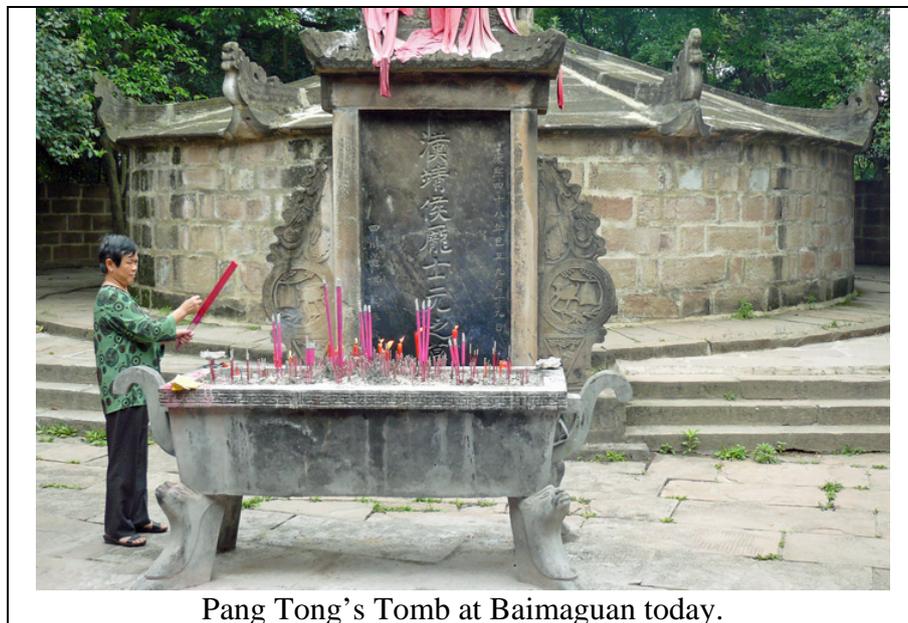
<sup>2</sup> The names Wylie uses for Chinese places are sometimes very hard to interpret or find in maps. A discussion of his transliteration of Chinese is included in End Note [1]. A table of the names Wylie used matched with current places and names using Pinyin is also included as a separate document. Wylie's names are used here in “quotes” to provide a flavour of his text.

one could say that in London, Paris and Moscow today, goods from Chengdu are not rare. But Wylie was mistaken that the only European who had preceded him to Chengdu was Marco Polo and we will return to this view of Wylie's later.

## Chengdu to Da'an by the Golden Ox Road

Wylie and John left the gates of Chengdu on 27 July, 1868 and travelled north for the greater part along what is today Highway G108 which in turn is generally close to the route of the first motor road from Chengdu to the Wei Valley. The section of the first motor road near Wylie's route was completed by 1935 (Wiens, 1949a). Wylie describes the complex river systems and terrain away from the route he travelled in some detail so he must have been referring to current Chinese or Western maps as well as making direct observations.

Restricting the narrative to the major towns (Prefectures and District Cities in Wylie's terminology or Cities and Counties in today's) the first such place they came to was "Sin-too" or Xindu Xian (新都县) which is today an Area (区) on the edge of Chengdu City. Travelling on they reached the departmental city of "Han" (Qing Han Zhou, 汉州; present day Guanghan City, 广汉市). Wylie does not mention the District city of Deyang and he must have passed it by to find a bridge over the Mianyang River. He certainly mentions the "Pi-ma-kuang" or Baima Guan (Whitehorse Pass, 白马关) that marks the point where you leave the Chengdu plain and head into more hilly areas.



Pang Tong's Tomb at Baimaguan today.

Wylie wonders in his paper if Baima Guan could be the location of the city of "Ach-baluch Manji" mentioned by Marco Polo? Nearby, he visited the Tomb of Pang Tong (庞统), a Three Kingdoms hero on the side of Shu-Han and advisor of the Shu-Han "Emperor" Liu Bei, with its weeping cypresses. He notes "The whole establishment

was restored in 1697, and a gravestone erected, bearing the inscription, “The tomb of Pang Sze-yuen, Pure Marquis<sup>3</sup> of the Han dynasty.”

Wylie at this time was travelling close to present day G108 and describes many villages in some detail. Of these, most but not all can now be found on or near the present highway. Their journey went through “Lo-keang” (Luojiang Xian, 罗江县) to the city of “Meen” (Qing Mian Zhou 绵州; present day Mianyang City, 绵阳市). There he found a large number of troops quartered whom he avoided as he did throughout the trip. He said they “were on their way to engage the Mohammedan rebels in Shen-se [Shaanxi]”. Wylie rarely mentions the effects of contemporary troubles that wracked China, such as damage to villages and cities that had been in the path of the Taiping rebels. He does, however, often remark on the preference of people to live outside city walls with access to “Zhai” (寨) forts on hilltops<sup>4</sup>. As the road ran north, Wylie described how there were regular (“every four or five miles”) guard stations but he was not impressed. He notes “Our day’s journey took us through a number of poor and insignificant villages, with a military guard station about every four or five miles. . . . . an official is said to be attached to each, whose services are sometimes required to forward a despatch. These stations are found throughout the greater part of China, at least the northern portions; and are ostensibly intended to furnish escorts to travellers whenever demanded: but such an appendage on the road we were travelling would have been an utter superfluity. At many of the stations, three or five turrets, representing the old smoke telegraphs, still remain, but it is needless to say, they merely stand as symbols of the past”.

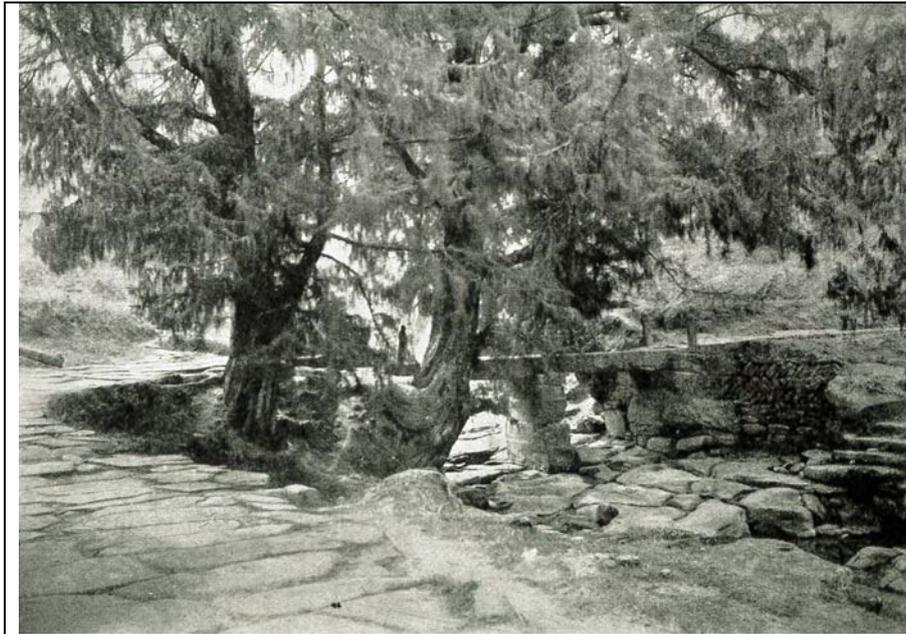
The District city of “Tsze-tung” (Zitong Xian, 梓潼县), which in Wylie’s day had an eleven storey Pagoda and impressive city walls, is regarded by some as the start of the Jinniu Shu Road and from this place the route is certainly much more hilly and difficult. Wylie describes rivers and places as should an accomplished geographer but also happily spends nearly a page on his visit to a temple at “Keih-heang-poo, the reputed birthplace of Wan-chang-te<sup>5</sup>, a Taoist celebrity, idolized as the god of literature”. “Keih-heang-poo” refers to present day Qiqu Cun, 七曲村 where there are three temples to Taoist Wenchang Di (god of Literature), Popular Guan Di (god of War) and Buddhist Guanyin (goddess of Mercy). Wylie was truly a traveller as well as a missionary and geographer! Moving along the former Great Road (Dalu or 大路) they arrived at “Keen-chow” (Qing Jian Zhou, 劍州, today referred to as Old Jiange, 古剑阁 or Pu’an Zhen, 普安镇). He remarks on the current state of the Shu Road at this point. “There is a good stone road the greater part of the way from the district city of Tse-tung to Keen-chow and a considerable distance beyond; and the outline may be traced far off by a double line of weeping cypress-trees occurring at intervals; sometimes only one or two together, but in many places forming an avenue of fine old specimens. These were planted and the road made in the early part of the sixteenth century, so that many of the trees have gone to decay”.

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<sup>3</sup>“漢靖侯龐士元之墓”, Name Details: Pang Tong (庞统), style name Shiyuan (士元), posthumous title Jinghou (靖侯).

<sup>4</sup> See End Note [2]

<sup>5</sup> 文昌帝君 or Wenchang Dijun, god of literature and writing. Zitong has a local place now called 文昌镇, Wenchang Zhen, and the god is also referred to as 文昌梓潼帝君, or Wenchang Zitong Dijun.

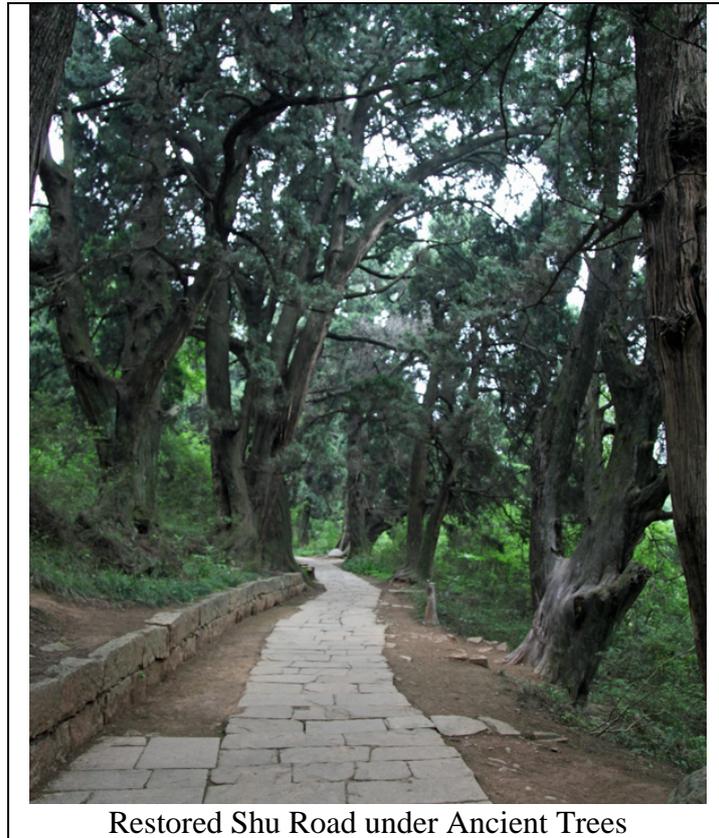


Stone bridge and Cypress Trees on the Da-Lu near Jianzhou  
photographed by Mrs Isabella L. Bird Bishop in 1897

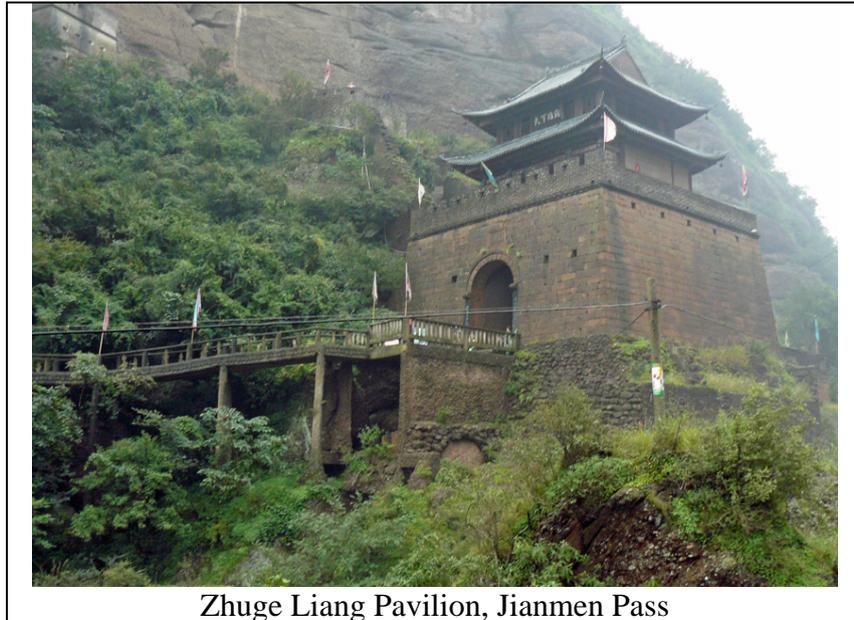
The traveller Mrs J.F. (Isabella L. Bird) Bishop came this way in 1897 on her way to Mian Zhou. She also made special note of these cypress-lined roads, writing “At the hamlet of Lu-fang, . . ., the by-road by which I had journeyed for some days joined the Ta-lu, the great imperial road from Pekin to Chengtu. I travelled along this westwards to Mien-chow. A thousand years ago it must have been a noble work. It is nominally sixteen feet wide, the actual flagged roadway measuring eight feet. The bridges are built solidly of stone. The ascents and descents are made by stone stairs. More than a millennium ago an emperor planted cedars at measured distances on both sides, the beautiful red-stemmed, weeping cedar of the province. Many of these have attained great size, several which I measured being from fourteen to sixteen feet in circumference five feet from the ground, and they actually darken the road”.

Eric Teichman (1921) is more succinct, writing: “the paved path is much of the way bordered by venerable trees hundreds of years old, whose welcome shade accompanies one at intervals right through these mountains for several days’ march” and Herold Wiens (1949a) felt that Wylie’s suggestion of an age of 400 years was more likely than Isabella Bird’s 1000 years. However, it is clear that the ancient cypress trees made a great impression on Isabella L. Bird. She continued: “The first ascent from Lu-fang under this solemn shade is truly grand, nearly equalling the cryptomeria avenues which lead up to the shrines of Nik-ko, Japan. Each tree bears the imperial seal, and the district magistrates count them annually. Many have fallen, many have hollow trunks, and there are great breaks without any at all. Still, where they do exist, the effect is magnificent”. Hope Justman (Justman, 2007) describes the surviving relics of this unique and famous section of the Shu Roads in some detail and describes off road relics that can still be visited. The village names provided by Wylie and other travellers as well as the remaining line of cedars indicate that present Highway G108 and the Jinniu Road often part company in this area leaving parts of the road in almost original condition. It is by far the most famous section of the Shu Roads in Sichuan and is sometimes called the “Emerald Cloudy Corridor” (Cuiyun

Lang, 翠云廊) which name has sometimes been applied to the full section from Qiqu Shan (north of Zitong) to the Jianmen Pass.



Moving north towards the “Sabre Gate” (Jianmen Pass) Wylie describes the remarkable relief of the terrain to the west of the route: “We were now at the foot of the Ta-keen-shan (Da Jian Shan), a range of lofty hills which had been in distant view for several days past. They are quite different in character from those over which we had been travelling for a week. The general direction of the range is north-east, with spurs branching out southward. The southern declivity is inclined at about 30°, and covered with verdure, but not cultivated. The crests are serrated in the most grotesque forms, and the northern sides have the appearance of being abrupt precipices. They extend away, range beyond range, till lost to vision. The Wor-tsze (Wuzi) or “Five Sons” hills had been in sight for two days past, in a north-westerly direction. These are five remarkable conical peaks of similar outline; four of which appear exactly the same height, and are stated in the topography to have an altitude of 5000 feet, but I do not think they are near so much.” They are, in fact, about 4500 feet in height and the mountains become higher in ranks away to the north-west with a north-east strike. The Wuzi form one row of a parallel series of foothills to the higher Longmen Range (龙门山) and it was the Longmen Fault that slipped on May 12, 2008 (512) resulting in the great Sichuan Earthquake, the effects of which can still be found along the route Wylie travelled.



Zhuge Liang Pavilion, Jianmen Pass

They moved on through the township of “Keen-mun-kwan” (Jianmen Guan, 剑门关 or “sabre” pass) to the “sombre pass of Keen-mun” (ie Jianmen Pass). This great pass, so famous in the time of the Three Kingdoms, is described in some detail by Wylie but even more space is given to the ancient story of the building of the Shiniu (Stone Ox<sup>6</sup>) Road by the King of Shu to obtain supernatural oxen that excreted gold from the King of Qin. But in the end, he only got the armies of the State of Qin arriving and appropriating Shu. That greed does not pay must have appealed to Wylie’s missionary nature. Wylie continues: “Towards the middle of the pass the road runs under a building called the Keen-kö (Jian Ge, 剑阁), the modern representative of an ancient pavilion, built by Choo-ko Leang (Zhuge Liang, 诸葛亮), which carries the memory down to the third century of our era [the Three Kingdoms period]. The ground story is surrounded by a battlement, and there are two stories above it.” The Jiange pavilion still guards the “sombre pass” which the 1930’s motorway and today’s G108 Highway both avoid. However, the modern Beijing to Kunming Tollway goes through the “Sabre Gate” once more.

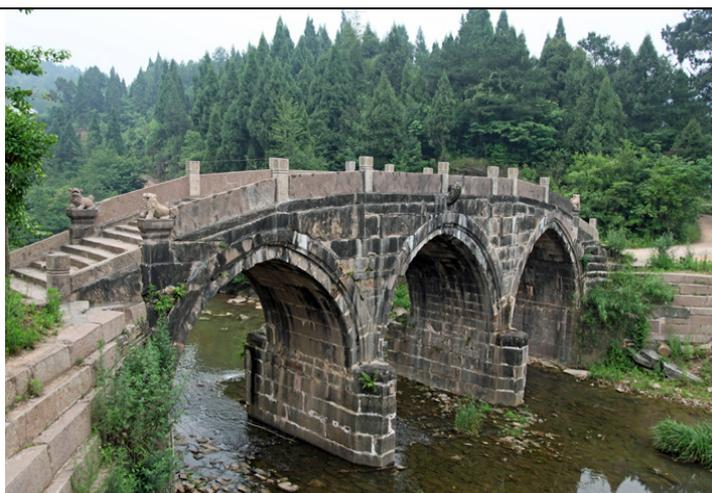
There also other relics of the ancient road in the Pass such as the Jianxi Bridge (剑溪桥) below the Pavilion. The person to whom Wylie correctly attributes the roadside Cedars (“Le Peih, the governor of Keen-chow”) came by the beautiful Jianxi Bridge in the Jianmen Pass and left a still standing Stele and his thoughts in 1517. His inscription is translated below the photographs of the Jianxi Bridge today.

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<sup>6</sup> Stone Ox Road or Shiniu Dao, 石牛道 and Golden Ox Road or Jinniu Dao, 金牛道 are alternative names for the road between Zitong in Sichuan and Wuding Pass in Shaanxi.



Present day Stele



Jianxi Bridge today.

<p>过剑溪桥</p> <p>春山晓度剑溪 桥踏雾冲云马 足遥见说金牛 经历处欲将兴 废问渔樵</p> <p>正德丁丑冬 剑州知州 武缘李璧书</p>	<p>Crossing Jianxi Bridge</p> <p>Dawn in the mountains; At Jianxi Bridge, horses in the distance Move through swirling fog and cloud; I have heard it said that the Golden Oxen passed through this place; If you wish to know about rise and fall<sup>7</sup> Ask the people along the road.</p> <p>Written in the winter of the (Ming) Zhengde Dingchou year (1517) by Jian Zhou Zhizhou Wuyuan Li Bi.</p>
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From the Jianxi Bridge, the old road travelled by Wylie and Teichman left the Pass and moved well away from G108 and the Tollway. It climbed up and down steep steps and stairs to cross the forested hills and passing farms through the village of “Ta-muh-shoo” (Damushu, 大木树) where he again reported on marvellous terrain. This stretch of the old road has been described by Hope Justman (2007) as one of the few remaining areas where the old road is relatively undisturbed. They moved on along ridges to reach the Tianxiong Pass (天雄关). This previously important strategic barrier and companion to the Jian Ge was on what Wylie called “New-tow-shan (Niutou Shan, 牛头山), a conspicuous hill, from which we made a steep descent, with the district city of Chaou-hwa in sight in the valley below.” Today, the Tianxiong Pass can still be visited, but when the present writer visited in 2012 it was still damaged by the Sichuan Earthquake of May, 2008. The Pass and the Buddhist Temple nearby have hopefully by now been restored to better condition.

When they had descended the mountain using steps that can still be found today, they arrived at “Chaou-hwa”, or present day Zhaohua (昭化), which has an intact city wall. At Zhaohua, Wylie’s continuing interest in the river trade was obvious. Zhaohua was the focus of an active river trade coming from the massive Jialing and Baishui rivers

<sup>7</sup> of Dynasties

draining from the interior and linking with the downstream Jialing. The combined waterway was navigable from Zhaohua to Chongqing (重庆) on the Yangtze River. He writes: “For the first time since leaving Ching-too, we found cargo-boats struggling up against the current; so that the passage by water may be made between that city and Chung-king (Chongqing), passing the prefectural cities of Paou-ning (Qing Baoning Fu, 保宁府; present day Langzhong City, 阆中市) and Shun-king (Qing Shunqing Fu, 顺庆府; present day Nanchong County, 南充县) on the way.” They then moved on to “Kwang-yuen” or present day Guangyuan City (广元市) after crossing the Jialing River by ferry near Zhaohua, travelling 14 miles along the base of mountains to cross the South River by a second ferry to reach Guangyuan County.

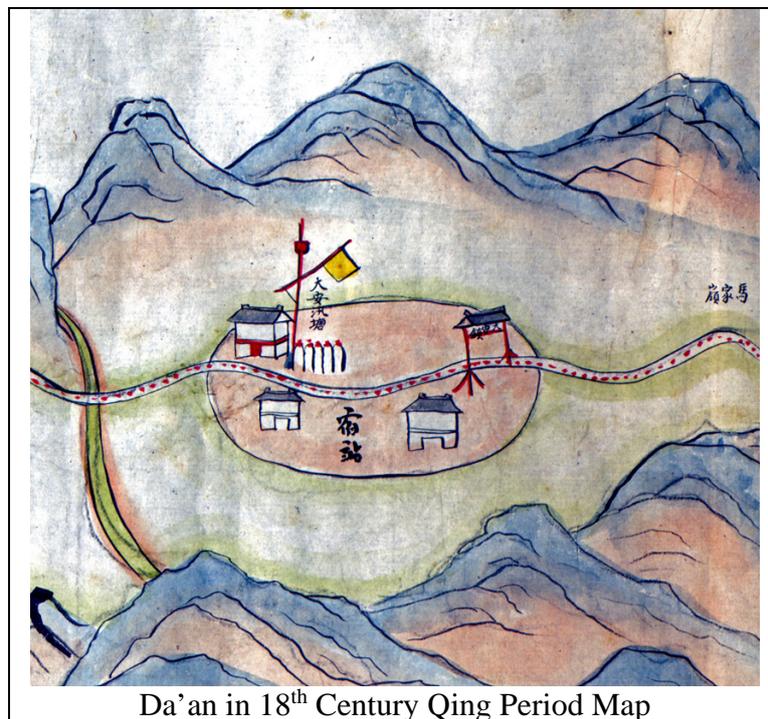


Tianxiong Pass in 2012

Today, the modern traveller on G108 or the Tollway does not go through Zhaohua. The roads were changed significantly with the building of the first motor road in the 1930's because of the combination of steep terrain and the complex of major rivers that pass out of the mountains through this area. The stream flowing through the Jianmen Pass is called the Jianmen stream and rises near the town of Jiange. After the Jianxi Bridge below the Jianmen Pavilion it continues downwards and eventually joins a massive confluence of rivers below. Wylie the geographer wrote: “The Jianmen stream unites with the Huangsha Jiang, a river rising among the Motian hills [the Motian Ling, 摩天岭], in the border area between Sichuan and Shaanxi [and Gansu] provinces, and flowing east for more than a hundred miles, after receiving several tributaries, the united waters enter the Baishui River.” At Zhaohua he continued: “The Baishui River, one of its [the Jialing River's] chief tributaries, is seen entering on the north side of the city. This rises in Tartary, and after a course of 1800 miles enters the province of Shaanxi, where receiving some very considerable affluents, it enters the district of Zhaohua, and unites with the Jialing within a mile of the city.” Some of Wylie's claims for the sources of rivers do not seem quite correct but many have only been fully established well after he travelled this way. The engineers building the first motor road in 1935 avoided the rough terrain by taking

their road down the valley of the Huangsha to Baolun and from there used modern bridges to reach Guangyuan. But the rivers often took their toll and would still do so today but for the massive Bailong River Dam. The modern Tollway once again comes through the Jiange Pass and then runs along the sides of mountains to avoid the river valley as much as possible. As some benefit to historians, this change in course has left considerable sections of the ancient road and associated relics, despite damage during the 512 Sichuan Earthquake, available for cultural preservation as well as recreation and tourism today.

In Guangyuan, Wylie the traveller once more recounted the attractions of cultural relics such as the Temple of Wu Zetian, the Thousand Buddha Grottoes and the Mingyue Gorge near the Chaotian pass to the north. Wylie and his party then moved into Shaanxi through the border gate at “Tseih-pwan Pass” (Qipan Guan, 棋盘关) and on to “Ning-keang” or Ningqiang (Qing Ningqiang Zhou, 宁羌州, present day Ningqiang Xian, 宁强县). Along the way, his interest in the river systems was, as always, paramount. But they were also travelling at a time of year when heavy rain was common and increasing so from here their passage was slower as they negotiated flooded streams, rising rivers and generally wet conditions. They went through the Wuding Gorge to arrive at “Ta-gan” or modern Da’an (大安). On the way, he describes the source of the Han River which at this stage was still just a small stream despite the rain<sup>8</sup>. At Da’an he notes that it is a “garrison-town, where there are three camps, with some 1000 to 2000 troops”. This observation is in accord with a Qing period map drawn nearly 100 years before which has Da’an as a large army camp.



Da'an in 18<sup>th</sup> Century Qing Period Map

<sup>8</sup> The official source of the Han has recently been changed to another place which represents the source of flow of the river better than the previous location. It is near Ningqiang. The question of the correct source is not, however, only a recent discussion.

## Travels on the Han River to Hankou

Up to this point, Wylie had been travelling a section of the “Ta-lu” (Dalu, 大路) that was also a Shu road (a road between the Wei Valley north of the Qinling mountains, or Qin, 秦, and the Sichuan plain, or Shu, 蜀). It had been both a main traffic and trade road and also a major imperial postal road since the Yuan period and possibly before. Marco Polo (Yule and Cordier, 1903) took this road to reach Chengdu from Xi’an. South of Wuding Guan the road was the section called the “Jinniu” (Golden Oxen), originally built for the armies of Qin and used to invade Shu in 316 BCE during the Warring States period. But after Da’an, a change came to their journey with much more use being made of water transport as they reached the upper end of the navigable section of the Han. This change must have been quite popular with the chair-bearers. The limit of navigation of the Upper Han is also discussed by Herold Wiens (1949) and is placed by Wylie as near to the town of “Tsin-kow” (Xinkou, 新口) just upstream (6 or 7 miles) from the district town of “Meen” (Mianxian, 勉县). Wylie also noted that the city wall of Mianxian was in good condition but seemed to enclose mainly maize crops and few people. This was another example of the general distrust people had of city walls since the Taiping troubles. Mianxian was effectively the main upstream end port on the Han River. Wylie, showing his keen interest in water travel, notes: “During the summer floods, when the gorges on the Yang-tsze are almost impassable, it is customary for native merchants to reach Sze-chuen *via* the Han; and, having reached this point, they take mules to cross the hills, about 40 miles, to the Kea-ling River, by which there is a direct communication with Chung-king and the principal places of the province”<sup>9</sup>.

However, the water route was not without its perils. The rain was falling and Wylie and his companions, after taking a boat from Mianxian to Hanzhong, were not able to see much of “Han-chung” (Hanzhong), leaving us no detailed descriptions of temples and legends as he had before. They also had trouble finding boatmen to take them further. Their initial plan was to go to Hankou *via* Laohekou<sup>10</sup> (老河口) by boat on the Han River. But between Hanzhong and present day Ankang (安康, Qing period Xing’an Fu, 兴安府) there were rapids and narrow gorges which were very dangerous after rain like that falling when they wished to travel. Instead, the party went overland by chair *via* “Sha-ho-kan” (present day Shahe Zhen, 沙河镇) and the district city of “Se-heang” or present day Xixiang (西乡) to below the most dangerous 30 mile gorge at “Cha-ke-chin”. This is presumably the present day Cha Zhen (茶镇) upstream from Wylie’s “Shih-tseuen” or present day Shiquan (石泉) on the Han River. Today this dangerous gorge is the site of a major dam. At Shiquan they were able to arrange water transport all the way to the Hankou settlement which suited them very well.

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<sup>9</sup> For further discussion of this statement, see End Note 3.

<sup>10</sup> Laohekou is a port area downstream of today’s Danjiangkou Dam. It was where the Han boat trade, going upstream, entered the mountains, separating the “Lower Han” from the “Upper Han”. Travellers often changed boats and boatmen here.



Rising waters on the Upper Han River (from Piassetsky, 1884)

But the rivers were still rising and the rapids below Shiquan could be as dangerous as those above. Wylie's boat was carried off by the current and damaged somewhat making a stop for repairs necessary. They stopped over for the repairs at a town called "Han-wang-chin" or present day Hanwang Zhen (汉王镇). Wylie, the keen traveller, climbed to the local "Zhai" fort and made notes on local produce. Throughout this area they came across extensive deposits of coal and an active industry mining the beds that outcropped on the river. They stopped at "Tsze-yang" (Ziyang, 紫陽) to take on a pilot for the approaching rapids downstream. Wylie wrote: "the waves were like a little sea, and far exceeded anything of the kind we had previously come to on the Han". After moving through rapids and coal cliffs and taking time to stop and visit the "Immortals Grotto" on the Mixi stream (which can still be found today) he reported "we reached the prefectural city of Hing-gan". At Xing'an (present day Ankang) they had to take on board another pilot to get them through yet more rapids to reach "Seun-yang" or present day Xunyang Xian (旬阳县).

Perhaps at this point, although the rivers can also be regarded as traffic routes deserving a more detailed investigation, we can consider them to have left the region of the Shu Roads to travel the "Huguang" Roads. After listing the rivers entering the much less dangerous section below Xunyang, Wylie finishes his account at the prefectural city of "Yuen-yang" (Qing Yunyang Fu, 郟楊府 or present day Yun Xian, 郟县). Yunxian is near the upper end of what is today one of China's largest dams, the Danjiangkou, a major component of the north-south water project. Wylie and his companions then had a 9 day boat ride from Yunyang *via* the lower Han River (below Jun Zhou, 均州 and Laohekou) to the Yangtze at the Hankou settlement. Overall, Wylie's description of the upper Han River between Shiquan and Yun Xian is consistently detailed, describing towns and villages, rivers entering from the sides, rapids, natural resources and industries along the way. It would have been a very valuable source of geographic information as people looked for routes by which they could travel to and from China's interior from the Lower Yangtze.

The rapids and dangers of the river at the time that Wylie travelled from Hanzhong to Hankou were many. However, despite the damage to the boat near Hanwang, Wylie was much more fortunate than either the traveller and naturalist Abbé Armand David (David, 1875) who came through this area in 1873 or the Russian Expedition of Col. Sosnovsky who came to the Han Basin through this area from Hankou in 1874 (Piassetsky, 1884). Abbé Armand David had travelled across the Qinling to Hanzhong via another Shu Road (the Baoye Road) and then chose to go to Hankou by river from Chenggu near Hanzhong. He had no trouble passing through the section Wylie avoided and reached Ziyang, where Wylie and company had taken on a new pilot and experienced the significant waves. David's boat was wrecked in the rapids just after this point. He escaped with his life and got to Hankou but lost many specimens and notes to the river. The Russian expedition travelled from Hankou to Hanzhong and lost one of their boats between Shiquan and Yangxian (the stretch which Wylie had avoided) with considerable inconvenience but no loss of life.



Shipwreck of the Russian Expedition on the upper Han River (from Piassetsky, 1884)

The consular officer Eric Teichman (Teichman, 1921) summed up the situation well saying: “The Han River is of course the main artery of communication. To Hankow downstream takes one to three weeks according to the state of the water, and the return journey upstream one to two months. Steam navigation on the upper Han seems to be out of the question owing to the shallows, shifting channels, and rapids. The worst rapids, some of which are very dangerous, lie between Yang Hsien (at the lower end of the Hanchung plain) and Hsingan (Ankang)”.

Today, large dams cover the wild rapids that challenged Wylie's party and the other travellers. Dams and rapids have both been prevalent in the upper Han because along its course, the height of the underlying base rock (and consequently the river bed) drops dramatically. Between Yangxian and Ankang, (which Teichman points to as the most dangerous section) the river height drops from 460m to 230m in two main steps with the first being between Yang Xian and Shiquan of 100m and the other between Ziyang Zhen and Ankang of 90m. Both of these stretches greatly challenged travellers

and are now major dams. Because of river management and siltation, the Han is not as navigable today as it was in the Qing period, but local river traffic is still common.

## Conclusions

Wylie's paper to the Royal Geographical Society of London was among the first published on China as the interior was opened to foreign travellers and it was the first of a very large number that appeared in the Journal in the following years providing accounts of travels into China's far west. Wylie, von Richthofen, Abbé Armand David and Sosnovsky all came to explore and provided their sponsors with detailed accounts of the geography, geology and resource potential of this part of China and corrected the existing maps where they found errors. Wylie's account in particular is an important and detailed account of the Jinniu Road, its status and its condition in the late Qing Period and was at the time an extremely valuable contribution to western people's knowledge of the unknown interior and its little known history. It is possible that Wylie felt he was the first European to travel the Jinniu road since Marco Polo but this was not true as many Catholic priests had travelled the hard roads to Shu all the way to Chengdu in earlier times (as described, for example, in Jupp, 2012). None, however, left as detailed an account of the road in terms of geography, history and travel as Wylie.

Neither the inconvenient mishaps during Wylie's travels in 1867, nor the disasters experienced by Abbé Armand David in 1873 and Sosnovsky in 1874 seem to have deterred the many missionaries who later travelled from the foreign concessions at Hankou to Hanzhong and *vice versa* along the Han River. They did this rather than endure the difficult Shu roads or the longer and no less dangerous journey by boat *via* the Yangtze. And it was not long after the explorers left that they arrived. It is known that George King of the China Inland Mission and his wife settled in Hanzhong in 1879 and they most probably came there *via* the Han River. Robert Davidson of the Friends Mission with his wife travelled from Hankou *via* the Han River to Hanzhong in 1886 where they stayed whilst preparing to move into Sichuan from the north (Davidson and Mason, 1905). A Catholic Mission and an orphanage were established at Guluba (古路坝) near Hanzhong in 1888 with many of the priests and nuns later coming by river rather than over land (Jupp, 2012). In the following 40 years many missionaries were to come to or through Hanzhong along the route pioneered by Wylie's travels. In this early paper, Alexander Wylie describes the route in detail and also provides insights for today into an interesting, if sometimes uncomfortable, period between the Opium Wars and the Boxer Rebellion as contact increased between adventurous westerners and missionaries and Chinese people who lived in the western interior of China.

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## End Notes

### End Note [1] **Wylie's transliteration of Chinese names and places**

Representing Chinese in western alphabets and presenting names and places phonetically but in a way that matches the structure of Chinese has been an occupation for many travellers. In Wylie's time, although there were many systems, there was still no accepted standard for transliterating Chinese systematically and phonetically. A major issue among Protestant missionaries was that they wished to devise a way to represent southern Chinese dialects as well as (or possibly rather than) Mandarin. As in all of the various systems people have derived, the Wade Giles and Pinyin systems are based on the observation that Chinese has many characters but few sounds. A single character has one sound modulated by a tone and both Pinyin and Wade-Giles had systematic ways to relate sounds and words. The many other systems have generally also used the Latin alphabet (Romanisation) and built Chinese names and titles etc out of a base set. However, many are quite hard to relate to Wade-Giles and Pinyin.

The places that Wylie visited along the way have mostly been identified in maps and with current place and river names. The cities and towns at department level or above also had well established names in Chinese during the late Qing period which was very helpful and there are many useful data bases for the Qing names to help identify his itinerary. In addition, Wylie published his complete itinerary of the round trip to

Hankou in Wylie (1858) in a Journal printed in Shanghai with good Chinese character type. It is an excellent resource with all the place and river names in characters as well as his rather difficult to read transliterations. Using this and other material, we now have a reasonably complete set of names in characters and Pinyin for places that Wylie visited between Chengdu and (almost to) Hankou. We have made use of modern and ancient maps, Wylie's publications, information of Qing period names and other means to reach this position. The Table developed is available on the [Qinling Roads to Shu Project](#) website. The many examples provided also allowed us to investigate the relationship between the transliteration he used and Pinyin. Two books Wylie published in Shanghai in 1867 (Wylie, 1867a, 1867b) used his complete system and also had matched Chinese characters. Although a complete study has not been made, it seems from these books that Wylie's system as used in publications in China was a lot more consistent and detailed than was found in the London printed paper.

In Wylie (1867b), Alexander Wylie addressed this situation as follows:

“The difficulty here alluded to, early suggested the general medium of European nations, as most suitable for the transfer of native sounds, and divers combinations of the Roman character have been successfully employed to this end. Not a few works have been printed in the Ningpo, Shanghae, Amoy, Hakka and Kin-hwa dialects. It must be admitted that there is much that is arbitrary, in thus diverting the Roman character to represent the Chinese sounds, and various artifices have been resorted to, to meet the requirements of the case. The difficulty of harmonizing the views of all concerned however, added to the acknowledged imperfection of the western alphabet for the purpose, has suggested other devices for attaining the object. Foremost among these stands the system invented by Mr. Crawford, and used to a considerable extent by the Baptist missionaries in Shanghae. This possesses the advantage of each character representing a single sound without ambiguity, and a consistent uniformity between the corresponding members of the several phonetic groups, while the component strokes are peculiarly adapted to the capabilities of the Chinese pencil. Other phonetic systems have been proposed, but we have not heard of their practical application.”

The observations above and Wylie's commentary have led to the following tentative conclusions regarding the paper in the Royal Geographical Society of London. The difficulties experienced by readers in identifying the names in Wylie's paper have two main causes. The first arises since the British journal apparently had difficulty in setting his names as they used a range of accents and special characters and was unable to print characters. This led to many problems due to errors and misprints or inconsistent simplification. The full table published by Wylie (1858) is needed to resolve most of these.

The second is that the lineage of Wylie's system (possibly the Shanghae Baptist system of Mr. Crawford) seems to be among Protestant Missionaries of Canton and SE Asia during the period from 1815 up to the First Opium War. The component “sounds” he used were most likely originally developed for southern Chinese dialects rather than Mandarin. This leads to issues when there is no alternative way to find out the Chinese name other than by the transliterated name. As an example, Wylie writes the name of the capital of Shaanxi, or “西安”, as Se-gan; Wade-Giles is written “Hsi-

an” and Pinyin is written “Xi’an”. The character for “peace” is also part of the Qing period name for today’s Ankang which was then “興安”. Wylie called this place Hing-gan which is a southern Chinese transliteration for the characters. The Pinyin transliteration is Xing’an. Hence, for Mandarin speakers and modern pinyin users, the names are in no way phonetic and are often very confusing.

#### End Note [2] “**Walls without Cities**”

During the Taiping rebellion, the rebels told towns and walled villages that they could either surrender or resist, but if they resisted and the rebels won then everyone in the town would be killed. So, being inside the walls was often a risk and a potential trap compared with hiding out in the hills. At this time, cannons were also improving and only the large Prefectural Cities (with walls like those of Xi’an for example) were really safe. Hill-top forts on steep slopes became popular and were common among the villages of southern Shaanxi.

Now many places still have the designation “Zhai” (寨) meaning a “fortified village” as part of their name. Along the Shu Roads there were many examples of this. Passing the departmental city of Mian Xian, Wylie noted the lack of people within the walls. Wiens (1949a) quoted travellers (most likely von Richthofen) who believed that Liuba to the north, which had well built and intact walls but no inhabitants, was a deserted city when it was just that the people preferred to live outside the walls. One member of Sosnovsky’s Russian expedition said: “In China, there are no cities without walls, but it seems there are walls without cities” (Piassetsky, 1884).

#### End Note [3] **River boat trade during the Yangtze summer floods**

A very similar statement in Chinese can be found in the Ming Period “Illustrated Travel Guide” which was quoted in a paper in the proceedings of a recent Hanzhong Symposium. The paper is listed in the reference list as Shi and Zhang (2008). Either Wylie or his informant (or both) could well have read this travel guide written particularly for businessmen in the Ming period.

Chinese is:

(明) 懋漪子辑 (1626年) 《天下路程图引》载有: “往四川货物, 秋冬由荆州雇船装货, 各府去卖, 春夏防川河水大难行, 由樊城雇小船, 至沔县起旱, 雇骡脚, 一百二十里驮至阳平关下船, 转装往各府去卖。”

The translation is something like:

The “Illustrated guide to all things about travel” by the Ming period (1626) writer Dan Manzi says: “In regard to the Sichuan trade, in autumn and winter the traders rent cargo boats in Jing Zhou and go to sell in all the cities [of Sichuan]. In spring and summer the rivers are disaster areas, so the traders rent small boats in Fan Cheng to (go to) Mian Xian, then use mules and porters by land for 120 Li to Yangping Guan to (re-)board boats, and transport the goods to (once again) sell in all the cities [of Sichuan].”

Jing Zhou represents the areas of the Yangtze near present day Wuhan where the traders collected their goods and Fan Cheng represents the general area where the

lower Han heads into the mountains, including Laohekou as well as Fancheng and Xiangyang Fu, and from where goods were also regularly transported north into Henan and beyond through a break in the east-west mountain chain. So, despite summer floods closing the Yangtze, the traders could still sell their goods using a strategic route via the Han and Jialing Rivers. Shi and Zhang (2008) also describe how, ten years prior to Wyllie's visit in 1867, this older option became even more popular when the route to Sichuan *via* the Yangtze gorges was cut off by Taiping rebels. The river trade on the Han River through Ankang boomed using the alternative route described above.