



*A Chinese falconer and his bird. Falconry was practiced in China 4,000 years ago.*

# China-Watchers of Yesteryear

BY AUDREY HILLER

In 1908, when Berthold Laufer, Field Museum's newly appointed assistant curator of Asian ethnology, made his journey into China and Tibet, he was one of a few Westerners who, in those unsettled times, succeeded in penetrating beyond the capitals and coastal cities of Asia. It was the year of the death of the Manchu Emperor, Kuang Hsu, and of the Dowager Empress. Imperial China was in its death throes.

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For 4,000 years China had considered itself the focal point of the universe. When the Chinese called their land the "Middle Kingdom," they were referring not only to the condition of being surrounded by "barbarian" nations; they also had

*The last of the Manchu emperors, Hsuan T'ung, or Henry P'u-Yi (1906-67) at about age 3. Upon the death of his grandmother, the Dowager Empress, in 1908, he became emperor, but abdicated four years later. The Japanese made him puppet emperor of Manchukuo 1935-45. After the war he converted to communism.*









▲ The wall surrounding Peking, begun by Kublai Khan in the 13th century, here seems to have the quality of eternity, much like Egypt's pyramids. Today, however, it is largely destroyed. The benchlike objects visible here on the frozen moat are sleds.

At intervals, gates like that shown here penetrated Peking's massive walls.





*This slide was labelled "Chinese and Manchu Women." The outer two women have bound feet, outlawed in 1912 but generally discouraged long before.*

in mind that middle region between Heaven and Earth, with the Mandate of Heaven being conferred on China's ruler. By the nineteenth century, however, very mortal problems, visible even to the Chinese, presented themselves. Conflicts between provincial warlords, increasing demands for trade and other concessions by the Western powers, unsettling political ideologies from abroad, and economic invasion forced, eventually, a radical change in government. Reforms instituted by the emperor in 1898 were too little and too late to stem the tide of revolution. In 1912 the Chinese Republic was born.

While most visitors to China in the late 1800s and early

1900s were either traders or missionaries—unwitting tools in the great reform—a few were voyagers who, like Laufer, came for scientific or academic purposes; others were there simply as sight-seeing tourists. An astonishing number of these visitors, whatever their purpose, visually chronicled their journeys with the newly invented camera.

Some of their photos, like that shown at the legation gate (P. 14), are poignantly expressive of the strains between Eastern and Western culture.

The current Museum exhibit, "Imperial China: Photographs 1846-1912," on view in Hall 27 through November 12,





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