

DEAD LANGUAGE OF ASIA, WITH 6,133 LETTERS, DECIPHERED

On the main route connecting China and Tibet, there was an influential minority race called Tanghut when the Sung dynasty ruled China. The Tanghut founded a kingdom in 1032 covering ten provinces including present Kansu and Shensi, and was known for its own advanced culture under the influence of both the Chinese and Tibetan cultures, as well as Confucianism and Buddhism.

This sizable kingdom used its own languages, which was composed of 6,133 letters and used in the area even for the 100 years after the kingdom fell to Genghis Khan in 1227. It then was abandoned to obscurity for several centuries.

It was in 1870 that this unique language, dead for over 500 years, was introduced to the world by Alexander Wylie, a British scholar in Oriental studies, as the Nuchen (Jurchin) language, and 27 years later, by Jean Deveria, a French philologist. However, they failed to decipher the meaning of the letters, which were complicated in structure and irregular in grammar as well as pronunciation.

But after years of laborious studies conducted by Assistant Professor Tatsuo Nishida of Kyoto University, Kyoto, who traced it with the aid of both Tibetan and Chinese documents, this extremely com-

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WORLD'S FASTEST LENS

A camera with the world's fastest lens, 50-mm, f 0.95, which is supposed to be four times faster than the human eye, has been put on the market by the Canon Camera Company, Tokyo, one of the leading camera makers in Japan.

This new camera is equipped with built-in exposure

meter together with a shutter-dial and range finder. A sharp focus can be made at any distance, even at the maximum opening of f 0.95 in which the depth of field is extremely shallow.

Among the high-class focal-plain types of camera, it is the first to be equipped with such a built-in exposure meter.

So far as the stories of Japanese bridges go, one of the best known bridges in Japan is the Nihonbashi (Japan bridge), which was the starting point of Tokaido (Tokyo-Kyoto road) in olden days and today is the center of downtown Tokyo. The history of this bridge tells of the history of bridge construction in the country. Originally a wooden bridge, it is now a steel and concrete structure beautifully decorated with bronze ornaments. "Oedo Nihonbashi" (Nihonbashi of the flowery

capital of Edo), as it is called in folk songs, has been rebuilt several times, recruiting the latest engineering skill of the period.

There are 126,700 bridges in Japan, with a total length of 16,720,000 kilometers. They represent the tradition of old Japanese culture and the affection the people entertain for time-honored architectural beauty. But large wooden bridges are gradually bowing out of public view, with the rapidly increasing availability of steel and concrete.

RESEARCH . . .

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attended another meeting of historians of Asia in Singapore early this year.

These conferences are only in addition to others more numerous which have been held under the sponsorship of Unesco and other United Nations agencies, or organizations affiliated with it, on the national, regional, or inter-regional levels. Their specific mention is only an illustration of the efforts of men of

DEAD LANGUAGE . . .

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plicated language has recently been deciphered. As a result, it is expected that studies on Hsi-Hsia will be advanced in the future, particularly in the field of East-West contact through Central Asia in the Middle Ages.

goodwill from all lands towards greater mutual understanding among them through education.

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*One Lady—Why do you want to get divorced?
Another—Because I'm married.*