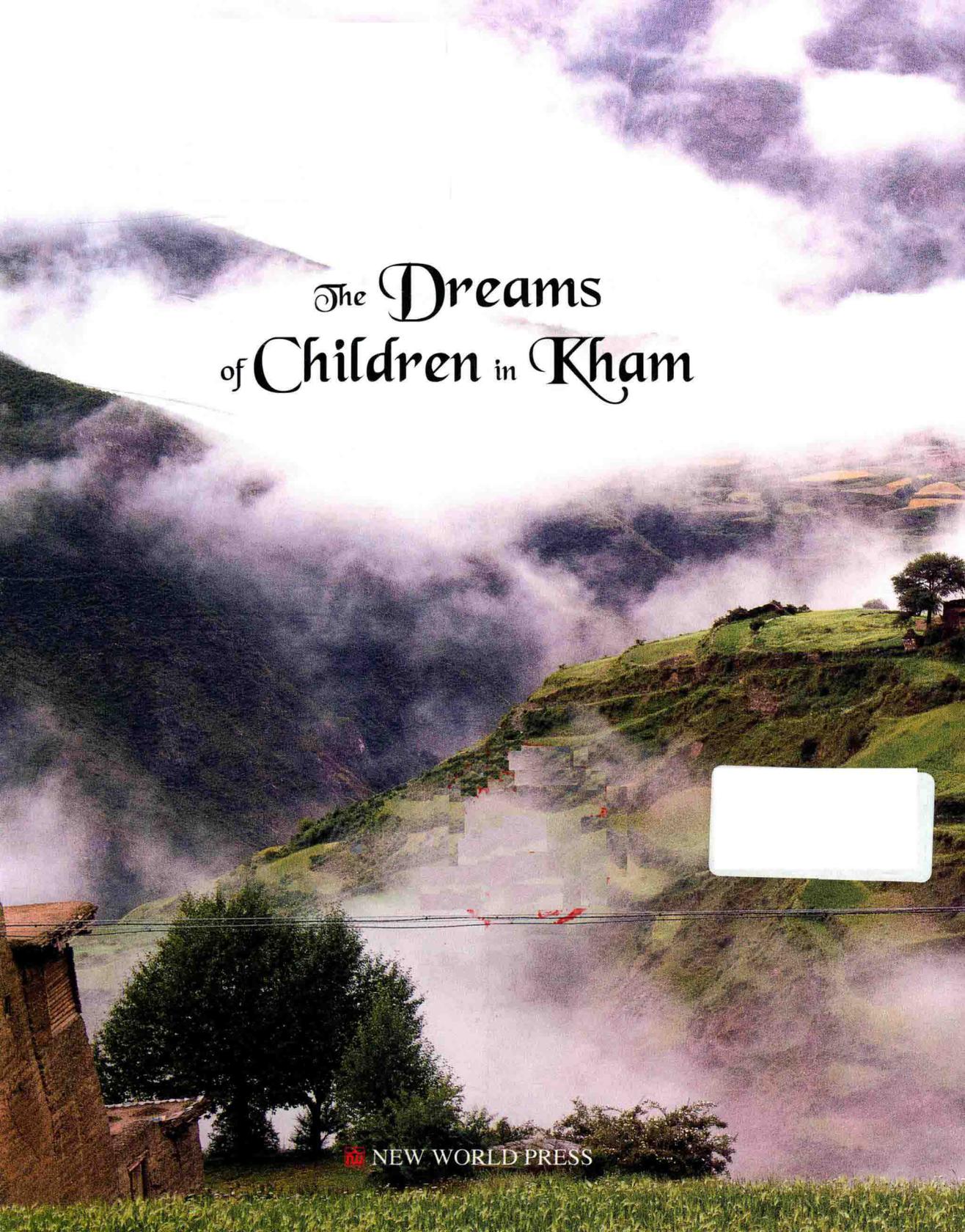


THE DREAMS OF CHILDREN IN KHAM

Words and photos: Xiaolong and Lijun

 NEW WORLD PRESS

The background of the cover is a photograph of a mountainous region. In the foreground, there is a lush green field. To the left, a portion of a traditional mud-brick building is visible. The middle ground shows a hillside with a small village of stone buildings. The background features steep, misty mountains under a cloudy sky. A large, empty white rectangular box is positioned on the right side of the cover.

The Dreams
of *Children* in *Kham*

 NEW WORLD PRESS

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

康巴少年的梦 = The Dreams of Children in Kham :
英文 / 小龙, 丽君著; 黄晓玉, 关尧译. -- 北京: 新
世界出版社, 2017.1

ISBN 978-7-5104-6101-9

I. ①康… II. ①小… ②丽… ③黄… ④关… III.
①散文集-中国-当代-英文 IV. ①I267

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2016)第298160号

康巴少年的梦

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译 者: 黄晓玉 关尧

英文审定: Eric A. Cooper

责任编辑: 董晶晶

装帧设计: 贺玉婷

责任印制: 李一鸣 王宝根

出版发行: 新世界出版社

社 址: 北京西城区百万庄大街24号(100037)

发行部: (010)6899 5968 (010)6899 8705 (传真)

总编室: (010)6899 5424 (010)6832 6679 (传真)

<http://www.nwp.cn>

<http://www.nwp.com.cn>

版权部: +8610 6899 6306

版权部电子信箱: nwpcd@sina.com

印 刷: 小森印刷(北京)有限公司

经 销: 新华书店

开 本: 880mm×1230mm 1/16

字 数: 250千字 印张: 11.75

版 次: 2017年1月第1版 2017年1月第1次印刷

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5104-6101-9

定 价: 168.00元

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客服电话: (010)6899 8638

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A misty mountain landscape with a valley and a small village. The scene is dominated by green hills and a valley filled with mist. In the foreground, there are some trees and a small building. The sky is filled with dramatic, dark clouds. The overall atmosphere is serene and somewhat melancholic.

The Dreams of Children in Kham

 NEW WORLD PRESS

First Edition 2017

By Xiaolong & Lijun

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Book Design by He Yuting

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ISBN 978-7-5104-6101-9

Published by

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

Distributed by

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

Tel: 86-10-68995968

Fax: 86-10-68998705

Website: www.nwp.com.cn

E-mail: nwpcd@sina.com

Printed in the People's Republic of China

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Our Children's Paintings



Preface I

Tang Wang

(Tea planter)

In January 2013, Kashgar was covered by winter fog, cold and silence. On my way from the railway station to the old town, I could occasionally see flocks of black crows flying up and down in the sky. Without much difficulty, I found the Maitian Youth Hotel I had reserved online. As the Chinese New Year drew near, the second floor of the hotel was very quiet. A young man with a happy smile helped me check in. As a newcomer, I asked him about places worth visiting. He pointed to the ruins by the Tuman River outside the window and suggested I visit the local houses on the high platform, said to be over 600 years old, but being torn down soon. Then he continued typing on a laptop.

After I had stayed in the hotel for several days, we became more familiar and began chatting. He said he was Xiaolong, had ridden to Kashgar from Qinghai Lake, and was helping run the sparsely populated hotel while the owner was home for the Chinese New Year. Xiaolong was busy each day writing his first book, which describes his experience and personal understanding gained while riding along the way. After resting here for a while, he wanted to exit through the Khunjerab Pass and head west. I asked him how he could get financial support for this travel. He answered that he didn't know how, but just wanted to earn some money through writing. Also, his family thought he was still studying in Beijing and could send money to him. I read his manuscript and was touched by his words. His experience differs from many other people's, which endowed his language with a sense of freshness.

Walking along the Tuman River, I talked with Xiaolong about *The Book of Songs* and *The Iliad*. Literature has a long history. Though there are differences in literature between the East and the West, it originates from somewhere just like the source of a long river, with streams flowing in along the way before finally converging into one vast, mighty river. We are lucky to be exposed to literature in our short lives. I invited Xiaolong to my home in Yunnan. My study was open to him. Literature is a craft that needs sufficient training, meaning extensive reading. I earned little during the first half of my life with most of my money spent on books. So, although Xiaolong's manuscript impressed me greatly, I still felt he needed to draw more nutrition from extensive reading.

In July 2014, Xiaolong, who was unable to exit through the Khunjerab Pass, visited me in Yunnan with his girlfriend, Lijun, whom he met while riding. The year before last, he went to Lhasa by himself along the Xinjiang-Tibet Line from Kashgar. Talking about the danger he encountered along the way, he said while he was going around Kangrinpoche, the mountain was blocked by heavy snow. The Tibetans advised him not to climb

the mountain alone. It was better to go in a group so his partners could bring his body back if he froze to death. These words left me with a special impression. Is climbing a mountain so important and sacred, while life and death are so fragile?

When Xiaolong and his girlfriend arrived in Yunnan, I gave them my study for their use. I told them, "You don't need to go into the mountain to work with me. You can always find work to do wherever you are. You can read as much as you like when you are at my home." Apart from the two young people, an educator also came to our gathering. Thus, we could only talk about literature at the dinner table. Once, after drinking liquor, I became very happy and said, "Literature is the greatest freedom humans have achieved, which is the value it has to them." Hearing this, Xiaolong was very happy. Xiaolong and his girlfriend stayed in my home for half a month before saying goodbye. Lijun returned to university to continue her studies and Xiaolong went to Erhai Lake, Dali, of Yunnan Province, found a deserted cabin, and began writing his second book. He wanted to get his works published. When he talked to me about this, I told him writing was a solitary business; whether his books could be published did not matter too much.

We seldom contacted each other after that until one day in 2014 when he said he was on the way to Chamdo of Tibet with Lijun to teach as a volunteer. I knew that having attempted to write novels, he was also writing many poems. Occasionally, he sent me some for comment. It was not easy to comment on poetry. I found in his poems that Xiaolong obstinately stayed with binary opposition, either this or that, brightness or darkness. I had heard too much preaching like this since youth, so I do not accept such a dichotomy of the world. Literature blends multi-levels, while expression of emotion is often overused. I talked with him about two issues: One was the self-discipline of literature and the other was the importance of restraint in the use of the written word. If there is a literary country, I believe people there sincerely talk about literature, tending to be more critical and less complimentary.

In the winter of 2015, following a year of volunteer teaching, Xiaolong and Lijun visited me again in Yunnan. I was gratified to see them eventually marry, as their relationship had seen many difficulties, but it turned out as fortunate for the two lovers to come together. However, literature, which bound us together, had become less conspicuous due to the camera. In fact, Xiaolong didn't buy anything for himself except a black Leica. The children in his photos were impressive and stories he told about the protagonists were unforgettable and unexpected. Xiaolong and Lijun had faced the pessimistic reality with good hopes cherished within their young hearts. Yet I had a different view on volunteer teaching. Given this, we tried to avoid topics about literature. One year of volunteer teaching made Xiaolong more mature, but less talkative. He was full of optimism and passion for photography, as he had previously been for literature.

I was surprised that Xiaolong contacted the press to publish his book, and did not expect that he would ask me, who lives in a deep mountain, to write the preface. I knew I could not evade it and didn't know how to write it. After carefully reading his articles and looking at his photos, I just wrote about how we got to know each other and some bits and pieces of our story. His language is simple, but radiates the warmth of a heart. His book provides deep insight into the sympathetic nature of human beings. It is a book on the human mind, and is an interpretation of compassion that many literary works endeavor to express. This preface may be disappointing, but please take it only as another interpretation of his works.

Preface II



Xiang Shu*

When Xiaolong told me his book describing his and Lijun's volunteer teaching experience would be published, I felt really happy for them.

I began to know Xiaolong while riding to Yardrok Yutso, or Yamdrok Lake. At that time, he stayed in a tent put up by the lake. He often went to Lhasa by bike to buy daily necessities. Xiaolong's face became rough and tanned because of too much exposure to wind and sun. He rode a terribly worn bike with the back wheel fixed with a two-wheeled rack truck for carrying goods. Such a bike matched well to his ragged jacket and disheveled hair, so he looked like us, geologists living in the wilderness. He was outgoing and often burst into laughter when chatting, showing his white teeth and narrowing his small eyes to slits. He looked easygoing and agreeable to what you were talking about. But once you got to know him long, you would find he is a man who has experienced twists and turns, and has strong ideas and his own way of conducting himself.

He was living by the lake, writing his book. He chatted with me about what he had seen and heard, as well as his feelings along the way. To experience his life, I took a simple tent, put it up, and slept a night by the lake with him. That night, I planned to enjoy the moon and stars by the lake while chatting amiably. However, it rained the entire night! My tent leaked badly, so I had to squeeze into his small, messy tent.

Afterward, Xiaolong returned inland from Lhasa to see Lijun, turned to be a volunteer teacher, and collected cordyceps sinensis. Everything he had done was new to me even though there was an element of impulse to it. Xiaolong and Lijun's experiences of being volunteer teachers astounded me and helped me realize that effort is needed to improve conditions in the mountainous area and constant assistance is needed for the children there.

When young people graduate from school and step into society, facing uncertainty, an increasing number of them will choose to rove on foot or by bike instead of immediately starting work. After wandering for a long time, some are addicted to such a lifestyle without purpose. They rove for the sake of roving as described in the song *One Hundred Thousand Hippies*: "When we wake-up from our dreams, we begin to

*A geologist of a geological and mineral exploration team in Tibet

realize there is no way either in front or behind.” They become perplexed and lose their confidence. Yet, in fact, they are needed in many fields of society. The experience of Xiaolong and Lijun proves this.

Young people want to escape the hustle and bustle of the city and yearn for a life in remote mountainous areas. At the same time, distant mountainous areas need the help of such knowledgeable, zealous young people. They only need to stay there awhile amid the exhausted roaming, and try to help the mountainous area and its people, and meanwhile to find their inner peace and consider their own future. While saving their own soul and sublimating their state of mind, they can provide warmth and help to others. This was the way out for Xiaolong and Lijun during their roaming.

Initially, Xiaolong and Lijun conquered the rough, remote mountain roads by bike. Then, they dealt with the innocent children in the mountains with their love and passion. Now, they must say goodbye to their past experiences and start their new life. They are doing cordyceps business with reliable adults in the mountains. They expect to reciprocate to the children in the mountains, who had endowed upon them happiness, and help the children realize their simple dreams.

Summer, 2016, in Chengdu



Chapter One



**The Dream of
Xiaolong and Lijun**

Starting the Journey of Life

“Let’s ride to Lhasa, shall we?” an upper-classman at the Beijing Institute of Technology asked me in March 2012.

“I’ll think about it.” I waivered. But I, who was only thinking of escaping from Beijing and filled with a strong passion for seeing the outside world, ignored all possibilities of danger.

However, before departure, my upper-classman friend told me that he decided not to go because he had to begin his new job in the Huawei Company. Therefore, I prepared to travel alone. I bought a mountain bike, borrowed a tent and a sleeping bag from my friends, gathered pots and pans, and began my first long journey. My itinerary was as follows: Beijing to Chengdu to Lhasa; Wuhan to Shanghai, then Beijing, Qinghai, the Taklimakan, Karghalik, and finally Lhasa. I roamed 18

Encamping beside
Yamdruk-Tso Lake









months.

It was the period in my life when I began to separate from the hustle and bustle of the city and instead listen to my true heart. Previously, I had lived aimlessly, inundated with illusions of a society with money and fame. Now, there burned a fire in my heart, desiring to ceaselessly give out heat and hoping to be recognized by others.

Before, I felt very upset because I found that what I wanted would not come easily. I had never reflected on my thoughts! I thought that those things must have their own value and meaning since they are always pursued by so many people. Later, I began to realize that the pursuit of those things was actually a loss for a group

This is a depopulated zone in Ali, and the heavy snow ahead blocked my way!