

INNER MONGOLIA

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Chapter I

Physical Geography

敕 勒 歌

敕勒川，阴山下，
天似穹庐，笼盖四野。
天苍苍，野茫茫，
风吹草低见牛羊。

Chi Le Song

"Chi Le Plain
Lies under the Yinshan Mountains,
Where the sky is like the sides of a tent
Stretched down over the Great Steppe.
The sky is grey, grey
And the steppe wide, wide.

Over grass that the wind has battered low
Sheep and oxen roam." ①

The above lines give a good description of the scenery of the grasslands of China's Inner Mongolia, which is eulogized in a poem entitled "Chi Le Song" in the Northern Qi Dynasty (550—577 AD) many centuries ago.

Situated on the northern frontier of China, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region extends over 2,400 kilometres in a vast arc across the northern part of China. The vast expanse of fertile land occupies an area of 1,183,000 square kilometres, comprising one eighth of the entire territory of the country. In other words, it accounts for 12.3 percent of China's total land area and being exceeded only by the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and the Tibetan Autonomous Region, ranking the third largest among all the provinces or autonomous regions in China.

Stretching like a galloping steed across the northeast, north, and northwest of China, it borders on 8 provinces or autonomous regions. In the clockwise direction, they are Heilongjiang Province, Jilin Province, Liaoning Province, Hebei Province, Shanxi Province, Shaanxi Province, Gansu Province and Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region; it also borders on Russia and Mongolia to its north with a boundary line of up to 4,200 kilometres.

In geographic terms, the Autonomous Region is located on the Mongolian Plateau with an undulating terrain of highlands,

① The English translation for "Chi Le Song" is based on Tr. Arthur Waley.

mountains and plains, whose altitude varies from 1,000 to 1,100 metres above sea level. The exact location is from longitude 126° 09' E to 99°10' E; from latitude 37°24' N to 53°20' N.

As China's second largest plateau next only to Tibet, the Inner Mongolian Plateau traverses from north-east to south-west like a colossus lying diagonally across the Inner Mongolian area and occupies two-thirds of its total area. Stretching 2,400 kilometres from east to west and 1,700 kilometres from north to south, the landmass of Inner Mongolia offers a great variety of climates and physical features.

Inner Mongolia boasts 3 mountain ranges. They are the Yinshan, Greater Hinggan and Helan Mountains. The Yinshan Mountains emerge from the Huashan Mountain in Hebei Province in the east and terminate at Langshan Mountain in the west, stretching over a total length of 1,000 kilometres along the middle part of the Region. The major parts of the range are at 1,500—2,000 metres above sea level and feature gentle slopes in the north, growing steep in the south. The Yinshan Mountains exhibit a wide variety of secondary growth of flora and fauna, and constitute one of the chief protected natural reserves in the Region.

The majestic Greater Hinggan Mountains rise loftily to the west of the Songliao Plain. They traverse from the Mohe River on the right bank of the Heilongjiang River in the north to the upper streams of the Xiramuren (Siramüren) River in the south and occupy an area of 1,400 kilometres from north-east to south-west. This range belongs to the Neocathaysion Uplift Zone and is the biggest mountain range within the Region. Its ridge is

thickly carpeted with primitive flora and is endowed with abundant resources of wild animals. Range upon range of the Greater Hinggan Mountains are filled with rare birds and wild animals—red deer, black bears, etc.

Rising proudly in the west from the beautiful Yinchuan Plain are the Helan Mountains. This range extends 250 kilometres from the north to the south in a band 30 kilometres broad, with elevations varying between 2,000—2,500 metres above sea level. Its highest peak, known as Yinshan Obo^① (Dahuluclao Peak), to the southeast of Bayanhot in Alxa League, is 3,556 metres in elevation and constitutes the Region's "roof". The precipitous eastern slope of the Helan Mountains serves as a natural barrier which halts and causes the wet air brought by the summer monsoons to condense and fall on the Yinchuan Plain in front of the mountains, wards off cold air currents coming from Siberia and checks the Tengger Desert from moving further eastward.

Inner Mongolia has nearly 5 million hectares of cultivated land and 88 million hectares of grasslands (including 68 million hectares of usable pastureland). In addition, about 18,670,000 hectares of forest area is the largest in China. The forest coverage is 14.1% of China's total. Besides, the freshwater area comes to 0.857 million hectares.

The rich and beautiful Hetao-Tumd (Tumet) Plain and Liao-Nen Plain lie in the western and eastern fringes of Inner

① "Obo" means 'mountain' in Mongolian.

Mongolia respectively, like 2 inlaid jade gems. Located at the foot of the Yinshan Mountains, the Hetao-Tumd (Tumet) Plain is lengthy and wide—a total of 20,000 square kilometres of fertile land. On the plain, farmland is intersected by footpaths and crisscrossed by irrigation and drainage ditches, as the Chinese saying goes "The disastrous Yellow River grants and favours only to its Great Bend".

Covering a total land area of 50,000 square kilometres, the Liao-Nen Plain stretches fan-shaped across the West Liaohe River and Nenjiang River valleys to the east of the Greater Hinggan Mountains. With fertile chernozem or chestnut soil and ample water resources that guarantee easy irrigation, the Liao-Nen Plain has been eulogized as the "granary" of the eastern part of the Autonomous Region. Inner Mongolia produces wheat, corn, soybean, rice, castorbeans and cantaloupe as its main cereal and cash crops.

It is really not surprising that few people can imagine that Inner Mongolia, a deep hinterland region, can contain numerous rivers and lakes. Some seventy odd rivers have a catchment area of over one thousand square kilometres. The Yellow, Ergun, Nenjiang and West Liaohe Rivers are the Region's exterior rivers forming 4 major water systems. As China's second largest river, the Yellow River flows over 800 kilometres through Inner Mongolia, covering an area of 173,000 square kilometres. The Ergun River is actually one of the upper tributaries of the Heilongjiang River, forming part of the boundary with Russia. It has a total length of 1,500 kilometres and a catchment area of 115,000

square kilometres. West Liaohe River, whose total length within the Region is 450 kilometres, has a valley area of 130,000 square kilometres. And the Nenjiang River, which is a tributary of the Songhuajiang River, has a total length of 700 kilometres. Perhaps it is the river with the greatest potential for hydroelectric power in the Region.

One word should be added; all the major water systems mentioned above have dozens of tributaries.

Apart from rivers, Inner Mongolia boasts a thousand big or small lakes. Except for a few structural lakes, most lakes are not very large. Lakes with a surface area over one hundred square kilometres include Hulun Nur^① (or Hulun Pond, or Dalai Nur) Buir Nur, Wuliangsuhai Lake, Daihai Lake etc.

The vast land of Inner Mongolia is richly endowed with natural resources and it has long been praised as a land with "forestry in the east, iron and steel in the west, farming in the south, animal husbandry in the north, and mineral deposits everywhere".

The total areas of both pastures and forest in this Region rank first in the country.

As one of the five major bases for animal husbandry in China, Inner Mongolia has boundless expanses of natural open grasslands and is blessed with good conditions for comprehensive development of animal husbandry. For example, the Hulun Buir and the Xilin Gol in the northeast, Ordos (Erdos) in the west,

① "Nur" means 'lake' in Mongolian.

Horqin near Tongliao, Ulanqab near Hohhot and Urad near Bayin Nur are well known for stockbreeding. On the fertile steppes graze thousands upon thousands of cattle, horses, sheep, donkeys and camels. From the Greater Hinggan Mountains in the east to the Gaxan Nur in the west, grasslands stretch over 2,000 kilometres for an approximate area of 88,000,000 hectares, which amounts to one-third of China's entire grassland coverage.

Over 160,000 square kilometres, or 13.6 percent of the Region's total area is forested. The total timber resources amount to 950 million cubic metres, ranking first in the country. The overwhelming majority of the forests are centered in a 6,067 million hectares area in the Greater Hinggan Mountains where the total storage of timber is 840 million cubic metres. There exist about 300 species of trees, including a dozen varieties of fine-quality wood such as Hinggan larch (*Larix Mongolia*), Mongolian Scotch pine (*Pinus Syltris* var. *Mongolia*), needle juniper and Chinese pine, etc.

In addition, a fairly large number of secondary growth forests which are helpful to the conservation of water and soil, the regulation of climate and the environment, are located in the Yinshan Mountains and Helan Mountains.

Inner Mongolia has not only large areas of beautiful grasslands but also abundant mineral resources. It is also one of the provinces or autonomous regions which hold a relatively complete variety of mineral deposits in China. About 100 mineral de-

posits have been discovered in about 4,000 different areas all over the Region. Reserves of 60 minerals are among the top ten in China, with its rare earth deposit ranking first in the world. The storage of niobium, tantalum and natural alkali takes the very first place in China. Other minerals taking dominant positions in the country include chromium, zinc, aluminum, gold, silver, copper, iron, tin, mica, asbestos and other minerals. The proven reserves of 226.3 billion tons of coal distributed across the Region rank second in the country. Four of China's five large-size open-cut coal mines are located in Inner Mongolia.

On the whole Inner Mongolia is not a warm place. Owing to its great altitude and long distance from the sea, Inner Mongolia has a continental climate. Winter is long and harsh and in most areas lasts as long as five or six months. Summer is short and warm, lasting no longer than one or two months in most areas. Thus the cool and pleasant summer makes Inner Mongolia an ideal summer resort.

Extremes of atmospheric temperature are a common occurrence, so there is a great variety of daily temperatures. The mean daily range of temperature generally fluctuates between 12°C to 16°C. No wonder people say "Cotton-padded coats in the morning, gossamer webs at noon, and watermelons are only enjoyed in the evenings by the stove."

Another feature of the Inner Mongolian climate is its abundant resources of solar and wind energy resources. Solar energy cells and wind energy generators are available on the grasslands.

For administrative purposes, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is divided into six leagues (prefectures), namely: Hulun Buir, Hinggan, Ulanqab, Xilin Gol, Bayannur, and Alxa; and six municipalities, namely: Hohhot, Baotou, Wuhai and Chifeng, Tongliao and Ordos(Ordos), all directly under the Regional People's Government with Hohhot as the capital city of the Autonomous Region.

There are also 3 autonomous banners. They are Daur Autonomous Banner of Morin Dawa, Oroqen Autonomous Banner and Ewenki Autonomous Banner. There are 14 municipalities under the league government offices. They are Manzhouli, Hailar, Yakeshi, Zalantun, Genhe, Ergun, Fengzhen, Jining, Ulanhot, Arshan, Huolingol, Erenhot and Xilin Hot, Linhe.

Chapter II

Past and Present

Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is a minority autonomous region with the Mongolian nationality as its main body. The Mongolian nationality is one of the most populous ethnic groups in China. They have a long history of civilization, brilliant culture, unique language system and age-old traditions. Inner Mongolia, in fact, is one of the cradles of Chinese civilization. To the best of our knowledge, as part of the Chinese civilization, Inner Mongolian civilization can be dated back to prehistoric times. Rich cultural treasures and relics scattered across the Region, some of them dating back to the Old Stone Age. Archaeological excavations indicate the remote ancestors of ours created the well-known "Dayao Culture"^① in the suburbs of Hohhot, the "Ordos (Erdos) and Salwas Culture",^② the "Jalainur

① Ruins found to the northeast of Hohhot.

② Ruins found near Salasu, Ordos (Erdos).

Culture" ^① in Hulun Buir League, the "Hongshan Culture" ^② near the city of Chifeng and the "Xiajiadian Culture" ^③ within Jirem League.

Written records prove that more than ten nomadic tribes used to live in Inner Mongolia from the Spring and Autumn (770—476 B. C.) and Warring States (475—221 B. C.) Periods^④ until the time just prior to the Yuan Dynasty's (1271—1368 A. D.) unification of China.

Since ancient times, ethnic groups such as the Huns, Wuhuan, Xianbei, Turks, Huihe (Uygur), Khitan, Nüchen, Mongol, and Han have lived on the flat, open and fertile lands.

Generally speaking, the history of the Central Asian steppe peoples is an epic account of wars, empire building, conquests and periodic migrations of peoples back and forth over the broad expanses of pastureland stretching from the Heilongjiang (Amur) River in Eastern Asia westward to the Danube River. These migrations were associated in general with the development of pastoral nomadism as an economic base.

Rulers in the past in the Central Plain all kept a firm grip over the minority nationalities in North China by constantly resorting to military forces. Frequent wars and endless contentions kept Inner Mongolia in a prolonged state of rivalry and confusion.

① Ruins found in Hulun Buir League.

② Ruins found outside of the city of Chifeng.

③ Ruins found within Jirem League.

④ This is a period when China's slave society ended and feudal society began.

Roaming the banks of the Ergun River, the Mongols started rising up in the early part of the 12th century in the Hulun Buir grassland. Originally they had been a branch of the Shiwei tribes of east non-Han ethnic groups in ancient China. Within half a century, various Mongolian tribes had spread over the vast area of the Mongolian Plateau. Early in the 13 century, Genghis Khan (1162—1227) organized a powerful army and conquered other tribes on the grassland in the forests by Lake Baikal. By 1206, Temujin^①, after decades of arduous campaigns, succeeded in forging the various Mongolian tribes into a single ethnic unit on the Mongolian Plateau and founded the "Great Mongol Empire".

Later Genghis Khan and his descendants wiped out the Xixia, Liao and Jin regimes to the south of the Great Desert and set up a unified Yuan Dynasty in China, thus putting an end to the period of chaotic confusion in which different regimes vied with one another. The Yuan Dynasty was the first unified dynasty ever established by an ethnic nationality. Its political and economic influence extended over Central Asia and the western world and contributed a great deal to the civilization of present-day China.

Today, confronted with the rich and valuable relics, we can still hear reverberations of the past. The mystical Gaxian Cave, ruins of the grand Great Wall of the Qin Dynasty, delicate grave frescoes of the Han Dynasty, and simple Yinshan cliff paintings

① Genghis Khan.

mirror the wisdom of the peoples of all nationalities.

The Yuan Dynasty perished a mere hundred years after its establishment. By then most Mongolian tribes had retreated to the north or the south of the Great Desert. The Inner Mongolian Plateau was once more plunged into civil war.

In the latter half of the 15th century, Dayan Khan, a descendant of Genghis Khan, unified the areas. He organized the different Mongolian tribes into six "Wanhu"^①. Thanks should go to Anda Khan (also called Altan Khan), a famous chieftain of Tumd (Tumet) and the grandson of Dayan Khan. For the second time, he brought the whole area under control. The Ming Dynasty granted him the title of Prince Shunyi^② in 1571. He later introduced Lamaism from Tibet.

The Manchu tribes emerged at the turn of 17th century. Like rulers in other dynasties the emperors of Qing Dynasty carried out a divide-and-rule policy in border regions in order to bring other minority nationalities under their control. In the process of unifying China they subjugated all Mongolian tribes to the south of the Great Desert and divided Inner Mongolia into six leagues with 49 banners. So since then it has become customary to call the area inhabited by the Mongolian tribes south of the Great Desert, "Inner Mongolia", and the other Mongol-populat-

① Wanhu, or Tumen in Mongolian, literally means 10,000 households.

② "Shunyi" in Chinese means "following the irresistible desire and trend". Here it indicates that Dayan Khan conformed to the will of the Han and Mongolian People, letting bygones be bygones and allowing peaceful trade between them.

ed part "Outer Mongolia". The league system which still exists today can also be traced back to that time.

The Opium War forced China open her door, which became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society after 1840. It is not surprising that Inner Mongolia, lying on the strategic northern frontier of China, turned out to be an international arena of contention. For a hundred years, people of all nationalities in Inner Mongolia suffered merciless oppressions and exploitation by foreign imperialist powers and Chinese feudal nobles, but they struggled tenaciously with united efforts for their emancipation. The "Duguilong Movement" in the west, "Wuboged-Brotherhood" in the east, "Bailina Uprising" and the "Boxer Movement" swept across the entire Region.

Hundreds of patriotic and progressive youths in Inner Mongolia followed the lead of Dr. Sun Yat-sen during the Revolution of 1911. In 1919 many students and teachers from Hohhot Tumd (Tumet) Senior Primary School demonstrated in support of May 4th Movement. In July 1922, at the second National Congress, the Communist Party of China (CPC) mapped out a basic program for settling national issues inside the country and basic principles for instituting autonomy in Mongolia, Tibet and Xinjiang on the basis of national equality, which appealed greatly to the minority peoples. The "Guhuntan Incident" of 1927 victoriously forced the Suiyuan^① governor to accept all demands ad-

① Suiyuan, a province of China before 1954, was composed of the middle and western parts of present-day Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

vanced by the public. The "Duguilong Movement" headed by Sini Lama in Uxin Banner affected the entire Ordos (Erdos) area. They overthrew local despots and refused to pay levies or taxes. Their courage impressed the world.

After a hundred years of persistent struggle, and at the expense of thousands of precious lives, on May 1, 1947, the first autonomous government administered by minority nationalities in Chinese history was solemnly founded in Ulanhot. The inauguration of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region expressed the common age-long aspiration of the peoples of all nationalities in Inner Mongolia for hundreds of years and constituted a great event in China's political life. The founding of the People's Republic of China occurred two years after the inauguration of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and it created favourable conditions for the completion of regional autonomy for minority nationalities in Inner Mongolia, which now has a population of 23,260,000 (1997), composed of more than 40 nationalities, most numerous of which are the Mongols, Han, Hui, Manchu, Koreans, Daur, Ewenki and Oronqen. Under the Party's policies on ethnic minorities, and supported by the people across the country, and through a half century's hard and assiduous efforts, this backward, poverty-stricken, and desolate great desert north of the Great Wall has developed into a model autonomous region of political stability, nationality consolidation and prosperity in every field. These tremendous changes in the past 50 years testify that Inner Mongolia's prosperity today is the result of implementing the policies of equality, consolidation and co-de-

velopment among all nationalities under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Detailed description about the peoples in this Region will be found in the following chapter.