

CHINA'S SCENIC WONDERS



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A Brief Chinese Chronology

Primitive Society Remote antiquity-4,000 years ago

Xia Dynasty Around 21st-16th century B.C.

Shang Dynasty Around 16th-11th century B.C.

Zhou Dynasty

Eastern Zhou Dynasty 770-256 B.C.

Western Zhou Dynasty Around 11th century -770 B.C.

Spring and Autumn Period 770-476 B.C.

Warring States Period 475-221 B.C.

Qin Dynasty 221-207 B.C.

Han Dynasty

Western Han 206 B.C.-A.D.24

Eastern Han 25-220

Three Kingdoms

Wei 220-265

Shu Han 221-263

Wu 229-280

Western Jin Dynasty 265-316

Eastern Jin Dynasty 317-420

Northern and Southern Dynasties 420-589

Southern Dynasties

Song 420-479

Qi 479-502

Liang 502-557

Chen 557-589

Northern Dynasties

Northern Wei 386-534

Eastern Wei 534-550

Western Wei 535-557

Northern Qi 550-577

Northern Zhou 557-581

Sui Dynasty 581-618

Tang Dynasty 618-907

Five Dynasties

Later Liang 907-923

Later Tang 923-936

Later Jin 936-946

Later Han 947-950

Later Zhou 951-960

Song Dynasty

Northern Song Dynasty 960-1127

Southern Song Dynasty 1127-1279

Liao Dynasty 916-1125

Western Xia 1038-1227

Jin Dynasty 1115-1234

Yuan Dynasty 1271-1368

Ming Dynasty 1368-1644

Qing Dynasty 1644-1911

Republic of China 1912-1949

People's Republic of China Founded in 1949

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CHINA

S SCENIC WONDERS



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Editor's Note

China's Scenic Wonders is the first volume of a series of large-format books presenting China's geographic wonders through the camera's eye.

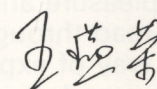
China is a large country, occupying an area of 9.6 million square kilometers. It stretches for 5,500 km from north to south and 5,200 km from east to west or, to put it another way, extends through 50 latitudinal degrees and 62 longitudinal degrees, crossing four time zones. Over millions of years nature has carved an infinite variety of landforms in this vast area, including many mountains, rivers and lakes that are among the most beautiful on earth. Some of these have been widely publicized in writings and pictures and often visited by tourists, but many are in remote areas where man has seldom set foot and nature still retains her simple, primitive beauty.

To acquaint our readers more fully with China's scenic wonders, we have invited expert photographers to take pictures of areas that are representative of China's diverse landforms. Our aim is to exhibit the beauty inherent in familiar places but not discovered before, in places seldom visited by tourists or in places previously regarded as colorless and unexciting. Our photographers wanted to show the beauty of form or geometric figures, the abstract beauty and rhythm of a space-time continuum, or the transient feeling inspired by nature. In short, our readers encounter a new world — a world in the eyes of photographers.

The articles accompanying the pictures contain information on the geography, history, ethnology, religion and mythology of the areas concerned, as well as legends and anecdotes, which will give readers a better understanding of China.

As we send the book to press, special mention should be made of photographer Yan Zhongyi. Over the years he has taken numerous pictures of scenes in China with the keen sensibility of a photographer, braving intense heat and bitter cold, disregarding dangerous terrain and harsh conditions. Our heartfelt thanks also go to Xie Ninggao, famous geographer and professor of

geography at Beijing University, who wrote the articles for the book, drawing on vast resources and his own travel experience, to Hou Renzhi, world-renowned historian and geographer and professor at Beijing University, now in his eighties, who found time to write the preface for the book though extremely busy in academic research and social activities, and to all those who contributed to the photographs or assisted in writing the articles.



Wang Yanrong
1993

Preface

This is a truly superb collection of scenic photographs. Selected from across the length and breadth of an enormous country with a long history and one of the oldest civilizations in the world, the "scenic wonders" presented here cannot be interpreted or evaluated in a general sense. The geologic structure of this country has undergone and is still undergoing infinite changes, creating fresh, unanticipated scenes. Our expert photographers, with their artistic inspiration and insight, have captured some of the rarest scenes and phenomena, and eminent geographers have described or expounded them scientifically in language the average reader can easily understand. The text and photos complement each other, producing results much greater than the sum of the parts, so that even casual readers will obtain both aesthetic pleasure and scientific knowledge.

Having read through the book, I wish to say a few words by way of explanation concerning some of the scenic wonders in the country's interior and along its borders.

One of the wonders in the interior is Xuebaoding, the principal peak of the Min Mountains, which rises to a height of 5,588 meters and is capped with snow the year round. At the foot of this peak is a valley that winds downward for nearly eight kilometers, in the course of which it drops about 700 meters in altitude. The floor of the valley is paved with colored calcareous deposits. Clear water flowing down the mountain collects in tiers of colored pools on the slopes, while all around are snowy peaks, green pines, springs, and cascades, like so many ornaments. This is the famous Yellow Dragon Valley. At one side of the valley is the Yellow Dragon Temple (Huanglongsi) with a couplet that describes the scenery perfectly:

"Jade peaks touch the sky, solitary pine
greet the white snow;

Golden sand paves the earth, yellow dragon
swims in a thousand layers of blue water."

The Yellow Dragon Valley is located on the upper reaches of the Min River, a tributary of the Yangtze. Below the flood-diversion project at the Jin River two more rivers, the Li and Ruan, join the Yangtze. Between these two rivers, forming a watershed, are the Wuling Hills, of which the

famous Wulingyuan Basin is an extension. This basin is a structural depression of Devonian deposits, composed largely of quartz sandstone with small amounts of limestone. About 400 million years ago this region was an extensive seashore. Movements of the Yan Mountains caused the land to rise simultaneously with the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau. Subjected to long periods of weathering and corrosion by flowing water, it eventually metamorphosed into a valley with a peak forest. It is a distinctly stratified region, containing high cliffs with sharp angles and edges in a variety of forms. The relative heights of the peaks are between 100 to 200 meters. The principal peak rises to 1,262 meters above sea level and is called Tianzi (Son of Heaven), a name derived from a legend. The center of this peak towers above the sides like a pagoda. When you climb to the top, you command a panoramic view of the thousands of hills and valleys in the Wuling range, a sight that will arouse endless thoughts and feelings.

As we leave the country's heartland for its borders, let us visit the western border first, and then the east, north, and south, citing just one example in each of the four directions. This will suffice to show that the country's 9.6 million square kilometers are adequately covered — a feature of the book that deserves our attention.

China's westernmost boundary lies in the eastern part of the Pamir Plateau (the Pamirs) of Central Asia. The Pamirs are reputedly the "father of mountains." Our ancients called them Congling, or the Cong Range. After Zhang Qian's trips to the Western Regions in the Han Dynasty, the Pamirs became a communications hub on the Silk Road. Glaciers occur wide and thick on the mountains in the eastern part of the plateau. Meltwater empties into the Gaizi River, whose lower reaches flow east into southern Xinjiang. The river water is crystal clear; after leaving the mountains, it drops down a steep slope, forming a huge flood-water alluvial fan. Above the fan is a world of ice and snow, a marvelous sight seen from afar.

Leaving the Pamirs and going east across the country virtually along the same latitude, we come to Shandong Province and the Yellow River delta. Each year the Yellow River carries up to 1.2 billion

tons of silt down to the sea. One third of this amount is deposited in a continually expanding area at the river's mouth. The sandspit at the mouth extends a maximum of seven to eight kilometers farther into the sea in a single year. There is a legend about a bird called Jingwei that tried to fill the sea. Here, in the Yellow River delta, the legend has become a reality. It is a rare phenomenon and one that has also provided us with rich natural resources.

China's northern and southern borders contain scenes very different from those in the east and west. The country's northernmost settlement is Mohe, a small town nicknamed Arctic Village. This town borders on the Heilong River to the north. The center of the main channel of this river is at 53°31'10"N, the legal northernmost point on the country's boundary. Exposed to icy blasts from the north, east, and west, it is an extremely cold place, the lowest temperature recorded in recent decades being minus 52.3°C (1969).

The many islands widely distributed in the South China Sea lie within the southern borders of China. The climatic conditions are the exact opposite of those at Mohe. Located close to the Equator, these islands are extremely hot the year round. The group nearest the China mainland is the Xisha Group, which includes the Yongle and Xuande islands and occupies a key position on the sea lanes from the Pacific to the Indian oceans. The sweltering heat is very favorable for the propagation of certain types of coelenterates that secrete a stony substance in various colors called coral. The twenty-odd islands and shoals in the Xisha Group are all formed from coral. In addition, there are many hidden coral reefs in these waters. Viewing the vast expanses of the South China Sea will also evoke numerous thoughts and feelings in the observer. Thus the scenes along the borders of the country in the four directions may be greatly different from each other, but all have their special attractions.

Another point that should be mentioned is that quite a few of the photos in the book were taken from the air, providing very broad vistas with unique characteristics. The accompanying textual descriptions of changes in and movements of the earth's surface should add much to the pleasure of reading.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that many of the

photos are of places where man has seldom or never set foot, such as Mount Qomolangma on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, Lake Namco, the terrestrial heat at Langju, Mount Gongga of the Hengduan ranges, the "devil's city" in the desert, and Shennongjia, where unaccountable wild men are said to have been seen. These photos and descriptions contain the most up-to-date information of interest to explorers and adventurers. In summary, this book is a reflection of the artistic value of photography and a vivid geographical work as well. As stated at the very beginning, China is a large country with a long history, a brilliant culture and endless scenic wonders worth introducing to the world. To meet the growing needs and interests of readers both in China and abroad, it is hoped that more such books will be published in the future.

侯仁之

Hou Renzhi

⇒1 **Mohe — China's "Arctic Village."** Situated on the south bank of the Heilongjiang River, Mohe is a small town at the northernmost tip of China. The center line (53°31'10"N) of the river's main channel is the country's northernmost frontier.

Mohe faces eastern Siberia, the world's "cold pole," to the north. The Sea of Okhotsk, known as the "icehouse" of the Pacific, is to the east. To the west Mohe is vulnerable to the cold waves that develop in winter in the Mongolian high-pressure center. Additionally, Mohe occupies an area where the sun's angle is low and the days are short in winter. These factors create Mohe's extremely cold winters, with a temperature of -52.3°C registered in 1969, a record low in China. Generally, Mohe's temperature is 10°C lower than that of other continental areas at the same latitude.

The high latitude causes the length of day to vary greatly in Mohe. At the summer solstice (June 22) the day is 17 hours long. Dawn breaks at about 1:00 AM and the sun rises at 3:26 AM and does not set until 8:34 PM. At the winter solstice (December 22) the day is only seven hours long. Mohe has the longest and shortest day in China.

The aurora borealis, popularly known as northern lights, is an atmospheric phenomenon generally observed at high latitudes, especially in the polar regions. At about 7 PM on March 2, 1957, this rare phenomenon appeared in Mohe. A resplendent red glow suddenly soared into the sky and immediately changed into a luminous streamer stretching to the south. The fascinating spectacle made a deep impression on the people of Mohe.

⇒⇒2 **The Hulunbuir Grassland** West of the Greater Hinggan Range in Inner Mongolia is an expanse of rolling grassland, a carpet of greenery under blue skies and white cloud drifts as far as the eye can see. This is China's great prairie. Its northern part, the Hulunbuir Grassland, is one of the country's finest pastures.

Eons of geological evolution and change created the Inner Mongolian highland plains. Hulunbuir Grassland covers part of these plains and the western foothills of the Greater Hinggan Range. Scattered over the grassland like so many pearls are lakes of all sizes, the largest of which is Hulun Nur (Lake) and the next largest Buir Nur. The grassland's name comes from these two lakes.

The climate on the grassland is marked by a clear division of seasons: long, cold winters; windy springs; wet summers; clear, crisp autumns. The amount of rainfall diminishes from east to west. In the foothills in the east the vegetation gradually shifts from forest to meadow. It is typical swampy grassland. In the west, however, which is overly dry, it is typical arid grassland. Compared with other grassy regions in China, Hulunbuir has good natural conditions. In the arid west the principal plants are *Stipa capillata* and *Aneurolepidium chinense*; in the swampy east they are *Aneurolepidium chinense* and *Spiraea aponica*. Only one of the many rivers, the Ergun, flows out of the grassland. All the others empty their waters into the lakes. The riverbeds are wide and shallow and the river valleys flat, forming good pastures with plenty of grass and water.

2. Photo by Yu Yuntian





Photo by Yu Yuntian

