

PANORAMIC CHINA

SICHUAN

Land of Natural Abundance



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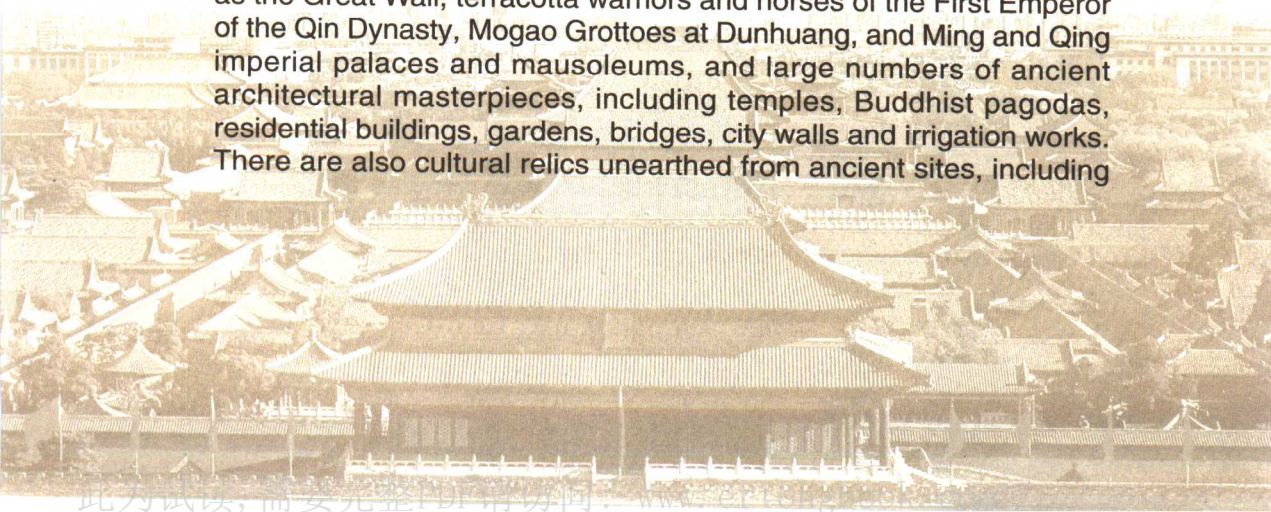
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Introduction

China has 23 provinces, four municipalities directly under the Central Government, five autonomous regions and two special administrative regions. Due to geographical and topographical differences and climatic variations, each area has its own unique natural scenery. The mountains in the north of the country are rugged and magnificent, the waters in the south are clear and turbulent, the Gobi in the northwest shines brilliantly in the sunlight, the hills in the southeast are often shrouded in floating fog, green waves of sorghum and soybean crops undulate over the vast fields of the northeast, and the mountains in the southwest, with sequestered villages and terraced fields, look tranquil and picturesque.

There are 56 ethnic groups in China. The Han, making up the overwhelming majority of the population, mainly live in the eastern and central parts of the country, while many ethnic groups with smaller populations live in the west. In China, all ethnic groups, regardless of size, are equal and respect each other. Each ethnic group has its own folk customs, religious beliefs and cultural traditions, and most use their own language and script. Regional autonomy is practiced in areas where ethnic minorities live in compact communities. All the ethnic groups call themselves "Chinese." They are courteous and friendly. In the ethnic-minority areas, the quiet environment, quaint buildings, exquisite fashions, unsophisticated folk customs and hospitality of the local people hold a great appeal to visitors from afar.

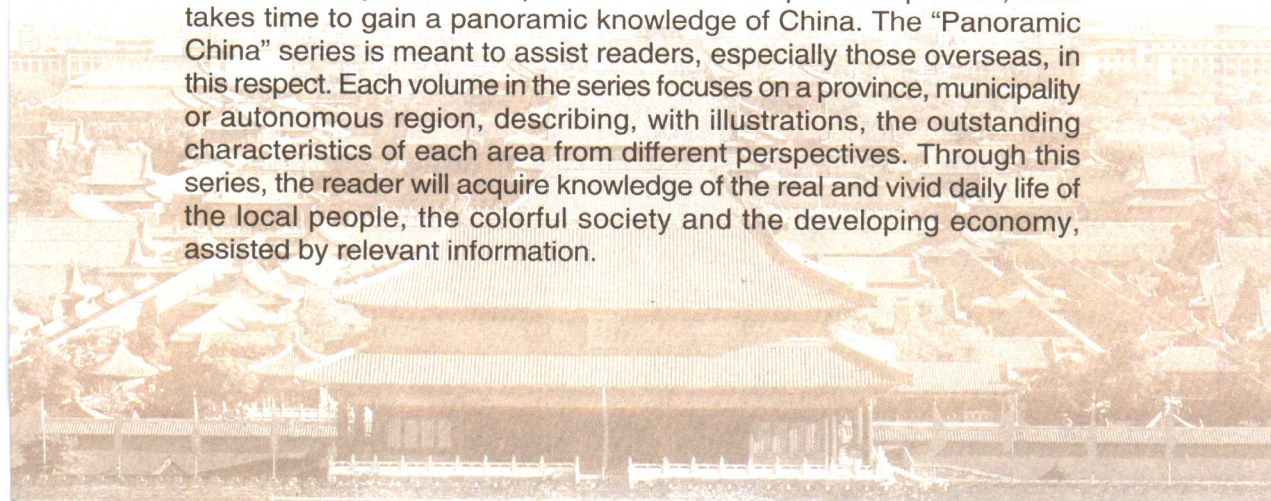
China boasts 5,000 years of recorded civilization and a brilliant culture. The country is home to such world-renowned cultural treasures as the Great Wall, terracotta warriors and horses of the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, and Ming and Qing imperial palaces and mausoleums, and large numbers of ancient architectural masterpieces, including temples, Buddhist pagodas, residential buildings, gardens, bridges, city walls and irrigation works. There are also cultural relics unearthed from ancient sites, including



painted pottery, jade ware, bronze ware, large and ornate tombs and foundations of historical buildings, and many more as yet undiscovered. The museums of China's various provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions house thousands of cultural relics and works of art, among which are treasures rare in the world, displaying the long history of China and the splendid Chinese culture from different aspects. The strong, deep-rooted Chinese culture has always influenced the mentality and moral standards of the Chinese people, having developed continually in pace with the civilization. A careful study of today's Peking opera, kunqu opera, shadow plays, calligraphy, painting, paper-cutting, and even the flower-shaped steamed buns on the kitchen range of farmers will reveal elements of traditional Chinese culture as well as replications of the art of the past.

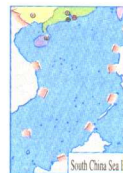
Like other countries of venerable age, China has suffered grievous calamities. During the century and more before the 1950s, the Chinese people made unrelenting struggles for the prosperity of the country, and national independence and liberation. A large number of insightful people and revolutionaries, cherishing all kinds of dreams for a strong China, studied the ways of the West in a quest for prosperity and strength, and borrowed the revolutionary experience of foreign countries. At last, the Communist Party of China, proceeding from the reality of China, and relying on the working people, founded a brand-new country, the People's Republic of China, in 1949. Since then, the Chinese people have made persistent efforts and explorations for the grand revitalization of the Chinese nation. The Chinese people's efforts in the past two decades and more have resulted in outstanding achievements, with rapid social progress, a well-developed economy, and a modern civilization and traditional culture enhancing each other.

It is easy to have a quick look at China's past and present, but it takes time to gain a panoramic knowledge of China. The "Panoramic China" series is meant to assist readers, especially those overseas, in this respect. Each volume in the series focuses on a province, municipality or autonomous region, describing, with illustrations, the outstanding characteristics of each area from different perspectives. Through this series, the reader will acquire knowledge of the real and vivid daily life of the local people, the colorful society and the developing economy, assisted by relevant information.

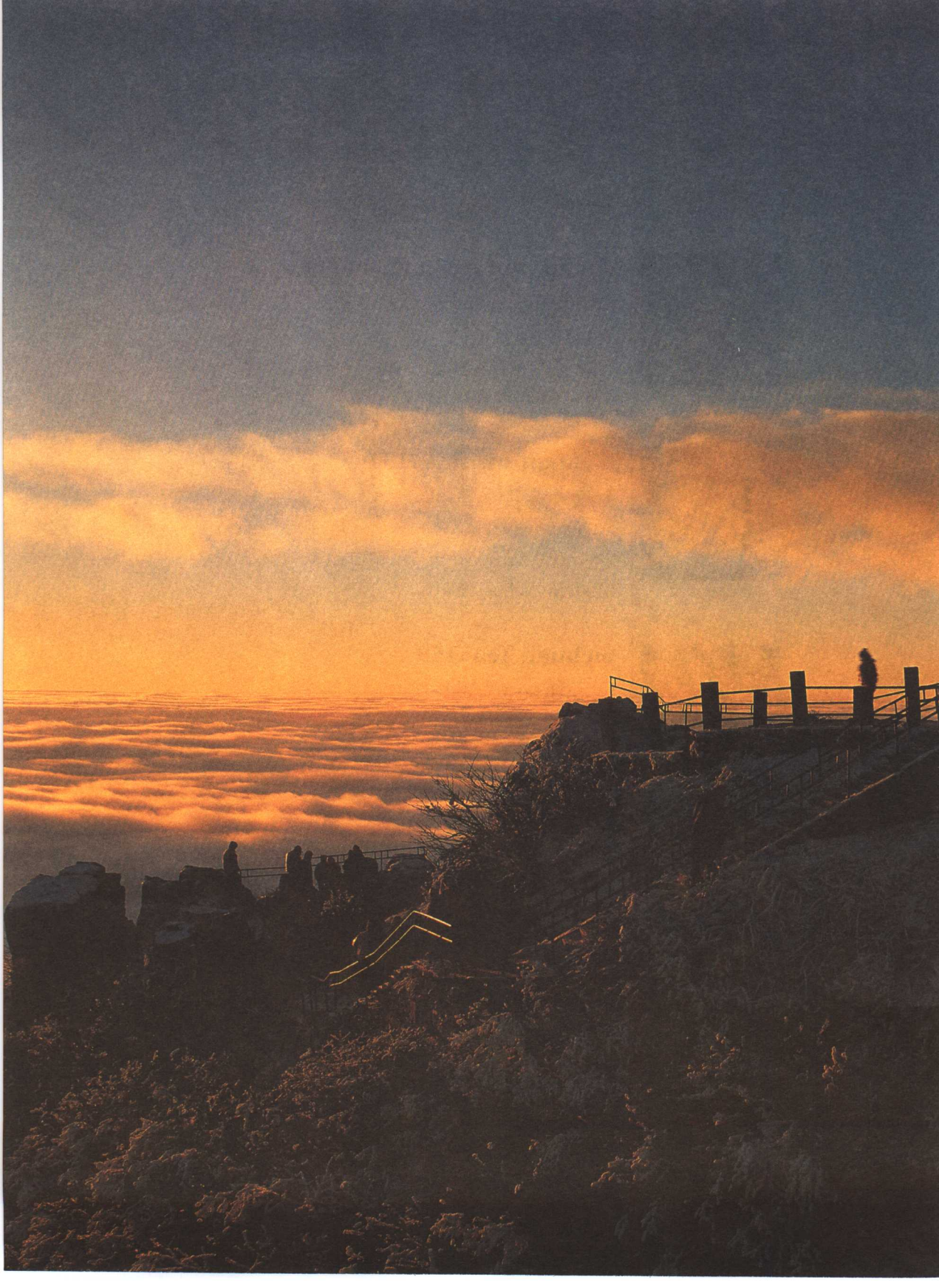


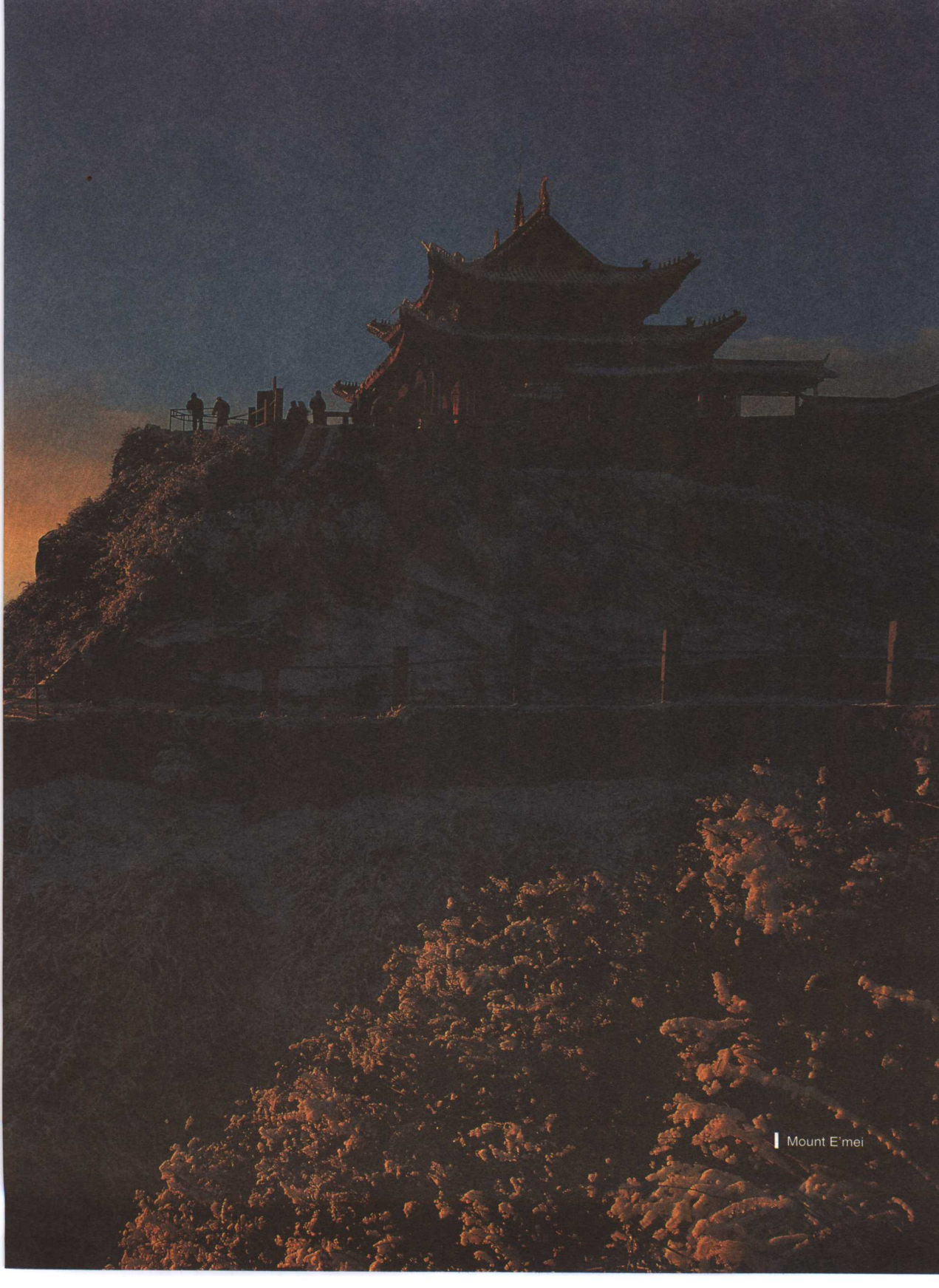


Location of Sichuan
Province within China

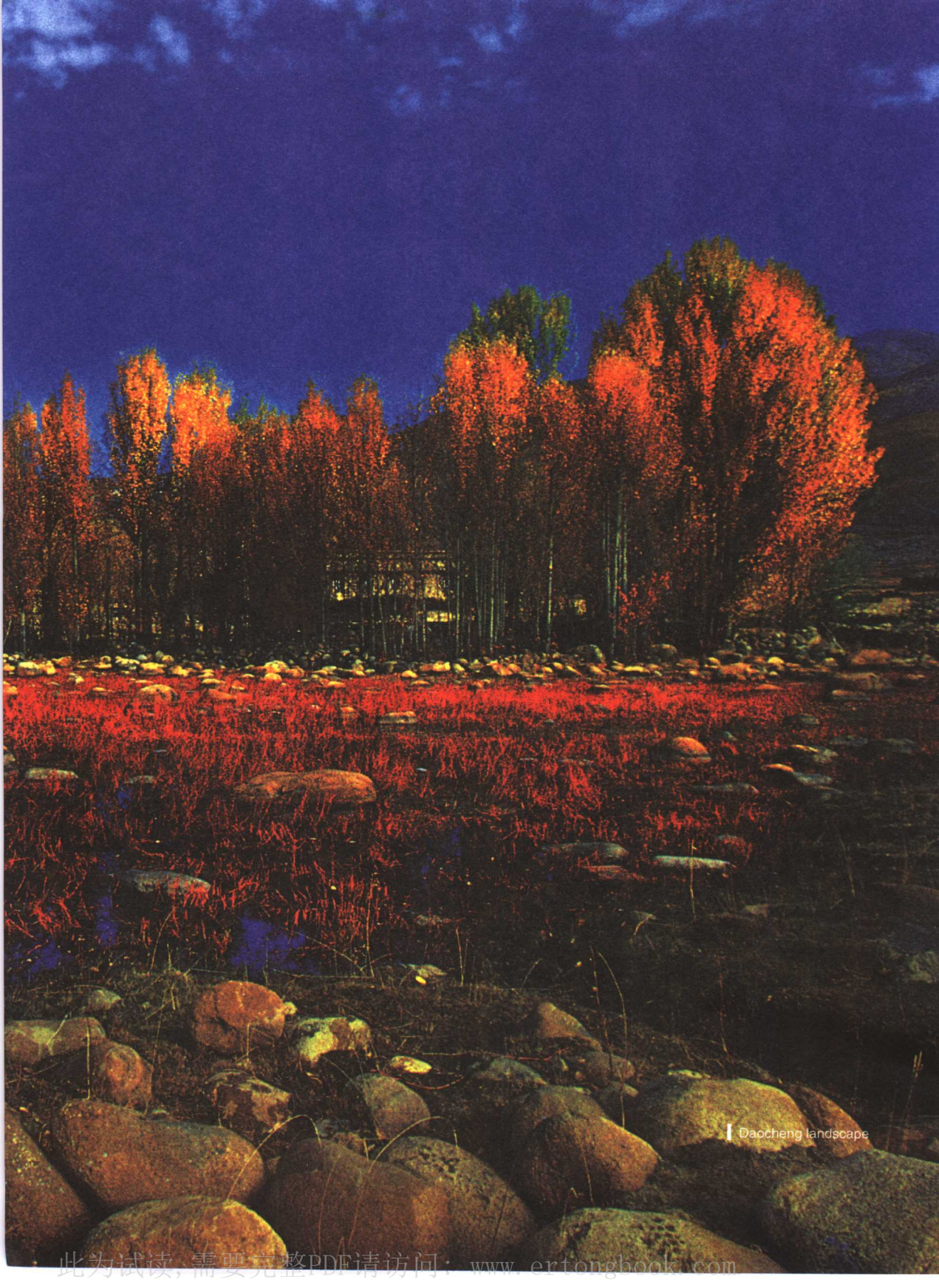


Administrative divisions of
Sichuan Province









Daocheng landscape



Foreword

Sichuan Province has been known as a “Celestial Treasure House” since ancient times. It is blessed with a beautiful landscape of topographic diversity, and it is home to a splendid human civilization. Its history goes back thousands of years and is refined by brilliant historic and cultural legacies, colorful and enchanting ethnicity and folklore, and a rich pool of celebrities and literary giants from various periods. Nature, human civilization, and rich social customs and conventions have interwoven into one another to create a “Celestial Treasure House” that lives up to secular descriptions as a “wonderful world of nature,” a “mystic world of culture,” and a “sublime world of the soul.” Naturally endowed, Sichuan emits an eternal charm of profundity and mystery that has lured swarms of visitors from home and abroad.

The beautiful land of Sichuan can provide a catharsis experience for both the mind and the soul. This book attempts to integrate Sichuan into vivid pictures that will enable readers to experience an envisioned tour of the province, tasting meanwhile its fantastic vistas of natural and human wonders.







The Origin of the Appellation “Celestial Treasure House”

Sichuan has been known as a “Celestial Treasure House” since ancient times. However, no laurel might crown its owners unless they had made due efforts. The fact that the honor is identifiable to no Chinese locality other than Sichuan indicates the diligence and wisdom of the Sichuan ancestors. It is also a result of historic changes.

“Celestial treasure house” was originally a term coined by ancient Chinese and reserved for their envisioned divine kingdom in Heaven. According to the *Zhou Guan: Chun Guan* (*Zhou Dynasty Offices: Spring Offices*, ancient book believed to date from the Western Zhou Dynasty, about 11th century-770 B.C., *Zhou Guan* is also known as *Zhou Li*, or *The Rites of the Zhou Dynasty*), the Western Zhou Dynasty was the first to use the term for the office that was in charge of the royal treasury and indicated the extent of its wealth. Later, the meaning of the term was extended to describe fertile land and places of natural abundance. The State of Qin during the late Warring States Period (475-221 B.C.) was the first state to receive the laurel, which referred in particular to the vast and fertile Weishui River Plain, including Guanzhong, Hanzhong, and Bashu that were then under the jurisdiction of the State of Qin. Bashu was composed of two former states of Ba and Shu during the Zhou Dynasty, about the 11th century-256 B.C., the former being located to the east of present-day Chengdu, and the latter within present-day Chengdu. (Today the terms Ba, or Shu or Bashu, in a broad sense, are still used as synonyms of Sichuan.)

During the Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24), fertile Bashu surpassed other areas to gain an increasingly important position in the country, and gradually was identified as the “Celestial Treasure House.” By the Eastern Han Dynasty (A.D. 25-220), Guanzhong was bereft of such an honor, and instead, became known as Jinshu, or Immediate Shu, indicating its degraded position to that of Shu. During the Three Kingdoms Period (220-280) Zhuge Liang, as recorded in “Longzhong Dui” (Answers at Longzhong), referred to Sichuan as the “Celestial Treasure House.” This has since been established as an exclusive synonym for the province.

- ▼ Qionghai
- ▶ Jiuzhaigou in spring
- ▶ Duck herders and their flocks in Meishan







