

LAND OF

XINJIANG



Western Areas of China

LAND OF XINJIANG

By Zhao Cheng'an

CHINA TRAVEL & TOURISM PRESS



In the hinterland of Eurasian continent lies
the largest province of China

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region is the largest province in western areas of China and covers an area of 1.6 million square kilometers.

Zhao Cheng'an, a photographer and winner of the Golden Image Prize of Chinese Photographic Art, devoted his whole life to his photographic career of Xinjiang. The album *Land of Xinjiang* demonstrates almost the all he achieved in his dozen years of photographic career of the region. The book publishes some 1,000 of his pictures in four parts: "Landscape in the Mountain," "Water for Life," "The Fascinating Desert" and "History of the Silk Road" and illustrates bold, constrained and profound Xinjiang in different seasons from different angles of view. Also this album includes great amounts of photos taken on planes, making it more attractive. The unique and individual visual angle and excellent professional skills of the author make the album of a higher value for photographic artistic appreciation. Also the vivid and interesting description by the author of his experiences makes it more readable.

From a unique photographic visual angle,
With excellent and professional equipment,
With industrious and insistent efforts,
With endless and lofty artistic spirit.

**To display western areas of
China in series
and to illustrate magnificent
natural scenes of Xinjiang**

Albums on Xinjiang by Zhao Cheng'an

Land of Xinjiang (published)

Scenes of Kanas (published)

Wonderful Natural Scenes of

Karamay (published)

Photographic Charming of

Xinjiang (published)

Chinese Petroleum Geology:

Junggar Basin (published)

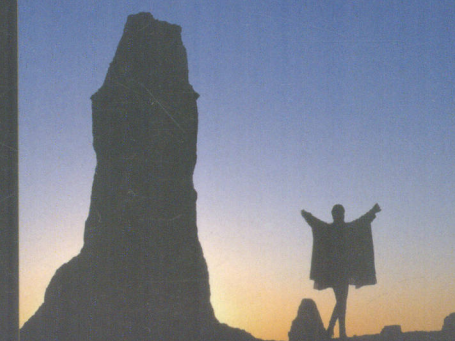
Chinese Petroleum Geology: Tarim

Basin (published)

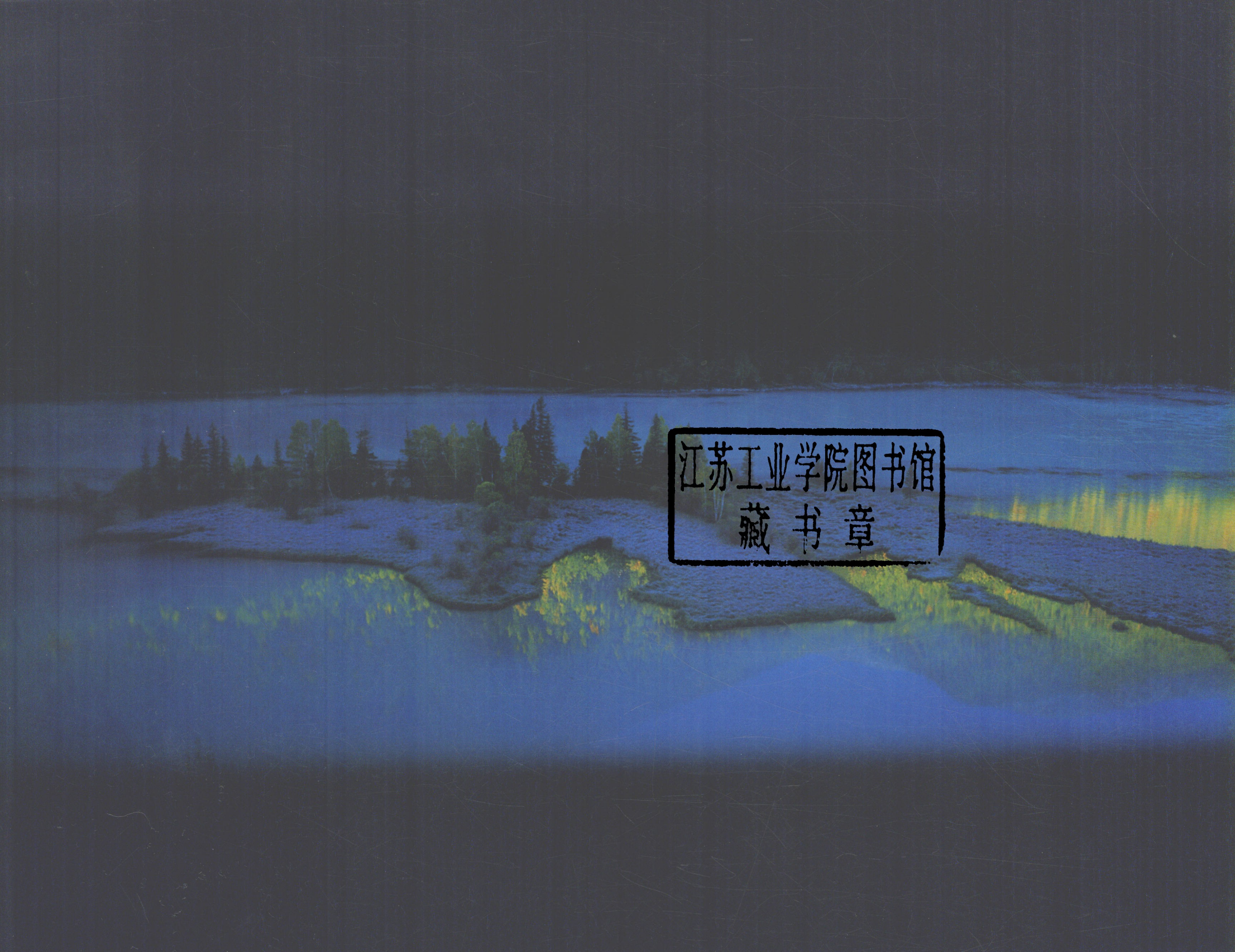
Beautiful Ili (published)

Miraculous and Beautiful

Haba River (published)



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The background is a landscape painting of a lake at sunset or sunrise. The sky is a deep, dark blue. The water is a lighter blue, reflecting the sky and the colors of the sunset. In the center of the lake, there is a small island with a cluster of trees. The trees are dark green and black. The water around the island is a lighter blue, reflecting the sky. On the right side of the image, there is a rectangular stamp with a black border. Inside the stamp, the text "江苏工业学院图书馆" is written in a black, serif font. Below it, the text "藏书章" is written in a black, serif font.

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藏书章



新疆大地

West in China Land of Xinjiang

赵承安·著 Text & Photos by Zhao Cheng'an

中国旅游出版社 出版

1.6 million square kilometers
Located in the center of Eurasia
From the land lower than the sea level
To the towering snow-clad peaks
The terrace land
Demonstrating different landforms
And beautiful natural landscapes.

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Charming Landscape of Xinjiang (Preface)



The Photographer Society of Xinjiang Airlines invited me to lecture on two subjects: the photographic resources in Xinjiang and enterprise culture of photography. These two subjects fire my enthusiasm for talking about the region.

A song sang by a Uygur female singer is heard everywhere in Xinjiang. It reads, "I have been to many places, but Xinjiang is the most beautiful one." The song expresses the deep emotion of the local people towards Xinjiang and the yearning of many people to the region.

The west areas of the United States on the other side of the earth are on the similar latitude with Xinjiang and even have similar geographical causes of formation. When US photographers turned such a wild land with no traces of human beings into still pictures, many people are shocked by its beautiful landscape, which is difficult to describe in words, thus promoting the establishment of national parks and natural environmental protection. The land is praised as "a gift given by the God to the American people" and "the sources of national dignity and US cultural characteristics."

I think not only the United States has such a gift from the God. To Xinjiang we need to discover it and demonstrate it in a deep way in order to open this Xinjiang-characterized west China to the world. In this 1.6-million-square-kilometer west land, there are tall snow-clad mountains, the world roof, the vast deserts, the surging rivers, mist-covered oases and lakes. In this long history there are many stories, which move people to tears. This picture album "Land of Xinjiang" is a portrayal of the gift given by the God to China's Xinjiang.

When I took pictures of Xinjiang and tried to understand the region, I remember Zhang Sai with a same native of mine of southern Shaanxi from more than 2,100 years ago. He went to West Regions twice on his business and went through all kinds of hardships and difficulties. He was very hungry without food. He hunted and took raw meat as food and drank blood as water. Sima Qian, a grand astrologer from the same historical period, praised him this way, "Zhang Sai experienced such hardships and difficulties with his persistence and

dauntlessness, generosity and confidence in others." Whether he is successful or not, his efforts should be respected. While in Rome, do as the Romans do. Certainly, Monk Xuan Zang's trip to the west, Marco Polo's travel along the "Silk Road" and Sven Anders Hedin's exploration received great respects from the people. The spirit of these great thinkers of the past inspire me and even when I meet troubles and difficulties I am pushed forward by a kind of strength which makes me go to Xinjiang, a gift in China's west areas.

Reluctance to Part in the Past 40 Years

I have stayed in Xinjiang for more than 40 years already. In the early years after my arrival, I was a teenager. I only knew Xinjiang is far away in the remote bordering areas and wanted to leave it for home one day. But the longer I stay there, the more reluctant I am to part. Because I have been attracted by the charm of the natural scenery of Xinjiang.

In the past four decades, I have traveled for 40,000-50,000 kilometers in the region. When I look down the land from the plane window or drive a Benz car with a big horsepower in the highland with a sparse population, I have a feeling of respects to the nature and I am a son of the nature and a man submitting to the nature.

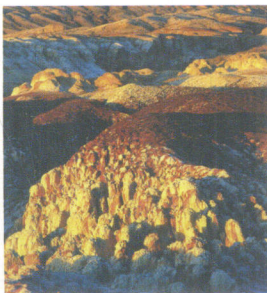


This piece of land helps me widen my field of vision for photography and enriches my life experiences. Also it let me fulfill my pursuit and aspiration and happy with my achievements and honors. A Hong Kong magazine summarizes this way, "Forty years ago, Zhao Cheng'an never thought he could have a good chance to travel the most beautiful place in the country and become a photographer to exchange directly with the nature. Except driving a cross-country car with a big horsepower on vast deserts or wasteland, he always took a special plane for taking photos of this mysterious land of Xinjiang. He is one of a few photographers who could take photos on the plane in China." I think when I finish my life I will be buried satisfactorily here too.

I have been to many places. Xinjiang is the most beautiful place in my heart. Why does Xinjiang have such a charm? When I answered the questions from the magazine reporter, I summarized in four Chinese words: contrast and nude.

Vast Land with Big Difference in Topography

Xinjiang accounts for one-sixth of China's total areas. On its vast land there are three mountains and two basins: Tianshan, Kunlun and Altay mountains, and Junggar and Tarim basins. These mountains and basins demonstrate



differences in their geographical features, such as that between the Aydingkol Lake in Turpan, which is 154 meters below the sea level, and the Qogir Peak, which is 8,611 meters high and the second highest peak in the world. Such a big difference in topography can be found only in Xinjiang, resulting in different natural sceneries of different levels. This is also an obvious difference Xinjiang has with other provinces and regions in west China.

The boundless Gobi Desert is scattered with black gravels. The biggest moveable Taklimakan Desert in the world is still moving after burying many ancient cities. But the oases surrounded by the deserts dot the edges of the basins like green pearls. The desert plantations demonstrate their persistence in their life.

Three Mountains and Their Features

The three mountains undulate for several thousand kilometers in Xinjiang. I roam about in them and see their unique but contrasting features. The rude Kunlun Mountain demonstrates its primitive feature, a beauty of strength. The Tianshan Mountains divide Xinjiang into two parts: south Xinjiang and north Xinjiang. On the snow-covered northern side are dense forests of Chinese spruce trees while on the southern side are traces of winds and rains. The granite Altay Mountain, which borders the former Soviet Union, has a landscape of the Alps in the Europe. The alpine forests and lakes make tourists feel they have entered into a quiet fairyland.

Coexistence of Beauty and Boldness

Xinjiang has a dry climate with less rain and much wind. But a lot places have different conditions, such as Ruqiang County has a rainfall of a little more than 20 mm. Especially Lop Nur is a synonym of death. But in the piedmont areas of the Tianshan and Altay mountains and along the Ertix River, you can see





the karst landform which can be seen in the southern areas of China.

The hurricane in the past dozen million years has turned the flat land into a Yardang landform composed of terraces, mounds and pillars of strange shapes such as the ghost city, three-ridge sand land, hundred-dragon piles and the city of dragon, which constitute an unconstrained and uncompleted beauty. But the Ili River Delta with plenty rainfalls and a comfortable climate has a charming, quiet and open country landscape.

One day in 1992, I took photos of the Junggar Basin on a Yun-5 plane which took off from Urumqi. In autumn the land below was a huge palette. Heavy colors of Burqin, Fuhai and Beitun, a combination of the colors of blue of the lakes and the golden vast deserts in Buluntubai and the great contrasts between the ups and downs of sand dunes and ripples of the lake water fire people's enthusiasm.

The undulating land and the mountains around bring unique features to the grassland in Xinjiang. A friend living in Inner Mongolia compares them with that in his hometown, "The grasslands in Inner Mongolia are vast and boundless, not like those in Xinjiang which are edged by snow-covered mountains." It is true



the edged grasslands in Xinjiang are comparative beautiful.

Softness and boldness, quietness and tumult, highland and low-lying area, remoteness and vitality are contrasts in the region.

Experiencing Four Seasons on One Mountain

It is an outstanding feature to have four seasons on one mountain. An article says this way, "People will be shocked by the changes in temperature. If the temperature rises from lower than zero to 40°C what kind of clothes we should put on?" On that day, we had our lunch in Dushanzi and were hot with shirts on. Soon, we left for the top of the mountain and felt cold gradually. Then it rained which turned into snow soon. When we got to Yuxilegen Daban more than 3,000 meters above sea level, the whole mountain was snow-clad. Such a great change in weather is attractive to photographers. People always say one day in Xinjiang people can experience four seasons. It is true.

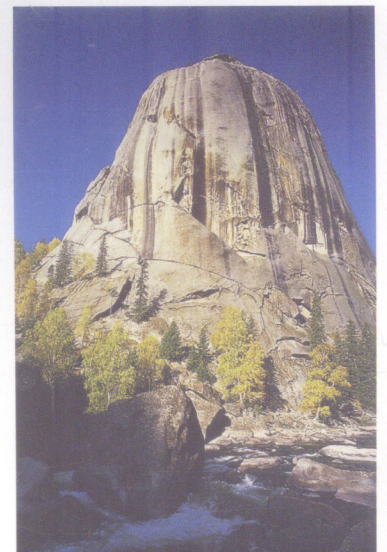
The climatic change has brought a good opportunity to the landscape photographers. The wild Gobi Desert lacks vitality during the day times. But when the sun sets, a bright crack appears in the west of the sky and the sunlight comes out of this crack, like a lamp on the stage. The sunset glow turns all the things bright and vivid. Naturally the contrast is so big. Ruoqiang County has a rainfall of less than 30 mm. One day it was pouring, seeming the year's rainfall was concentrated in that day. I drove to the Lop Nur and met a dozen currents in the distance of a dozen kilometers. When I arrived at the ancient city of Milan in the Lop Nur, the rain made the ancient city more deserted. In the following day, I boarded the Yun-12 plane and found the currents disappeared already and just zigzag tracks were left. Seeing from the plane, they constitute a modern abstract picture on the drawing board of this land. This mysterious land is very wonderful. During his visit to Kuqa, Feng Qiyong, an esthetic expert, stood on the bank of the Kuqa River, facing the fantastic peaks and wonderful rocks, and wrote

following lines, "There are 500 cities in the fairyland, Red clouds connect with North Gate. I have been to many mountains, but they are less beautiful than Guici." Then he wrote another poem, "I visit 10,000 peaks in Guici. Even the famous five mountains are not as beautiful as them. I want to be Xu Xike and tour the west areas."

Beautiful Rudeness

Colorful clothes make people look more beautiful. But esthetic experts, paints and photographers find rude body abstractive beautiful and call it the highest vision of beauty. When I took photos of Xinjiang land, I found the natural rude is beautiful too and was shocked by such a landscape. Without any manmade decoration and without any plantations, everything is in its original color. The rhyme, rhythm, ups and downs, falseness and truth, forwardness and backwardness, meander, rushing down, echoing, concentration, distribution and other elements can be found in the lens. Such kind of beauty, I were inspired by the understanding of geologists who can find the rich geological changes from various kinds of rude rocks. Here is like a geological museum. Based on their logical concepts, geologists express their love for Xinjiang. When I took pictures of such phenomena I were inspired by them. The beauty demonstrated by the tall, soft, colorful and fantastic things respectively illustrates a high vision of the beauty of the nature. Feng Qiyong compared this way, "The beauty of Xinjiang is unusual."

This is Xinjiang in the eyes of a photographer. I, a photographer influenced by the Chinese culture and modern concepts, have persisted in my loft artistic spirit, present this album "Land of Xinjiang" to you and expect to have your opinion and criticism.



Chapter One

山 中 世 界

Landscape in the Mountain

Kunlun Mountain

Lying horizontally and standing magnificently,
Being tall and stiff, beautiful in strength.

Tianshan Mountains

Lying in the middle of Xinjiang and dividing the region into
northern and southern parts,
With thick and green forests, it is full of vitality.

Altay Mountain

Being mysterious with many snow-covered peaks and forests
reflected on the lakes,
Demonstrating a European style open country.

The Friendship Frozen Peak Group of the Altay Mountain is composed of dozens of icebergs. The dragon-like Kanas Glacier flies down from the summit of the mountain and is the origin of the Kanas River.



On Xinjiang's 1.6-million-square-kilometer areas scattered many tall mountains which account for 55.7 percent of the region's total. The Tianshan Mountains is 2,500 kilometers long and 250-300 kilometers wide from north to south. The Kunlun Mountain is connected with the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and becomes the Roof of the World. It extends for several thousand kilometers long and is a natural barrier keeping the ocean wind off the region. The Altay Mountain extends for more than 2,000 kilometers long and crosses China, Russia and Mongolia. These mountains almost separate Xinjiang away from the rest of the world. When the transport facilities were not good enough in the old days, people



were confined in a small area for their whole life. Even the people in north Xinjiang who wanted to visit a place in south Xinjiang had to travel longer than to visit Beijing or Shanghai. Even some people who lived in cities did not know anything happened outside the city. On my first visit to the famous Kanas Lake 20 years ago, I asked about the lake, I was shocked by the fact that many people did not know about the lake or the location of the lake. Even today with modern transport facilities and developed information network, many places among mountains are not accessible by car. The mountains in Xinjiang are mysterious and romantic. The "Biography of King Mu" and "Classic of Mountains and Rivers" are romantic stories about the Queen Mother of the West and King Mu of Zhou Dynasty. The Kunlun Mountain symbolizes the back of the Chinese nation, the

ancestor of all the mountains and the totem of the Chinese nation. From mountains, the famous writer Jin Yong got his ideas for writing several swordsman novels related with the Tianshan Mountains. These three mountains are the back of the land of Xinjiang and demonstrate the height, strength and magnificence.

The basic feature of photography is going to the scene you want to take photos by yourself. Taking photos of mountains the photographer has to climb up the mountain. Limited by hands and feet, I tried my best but only took photos of some parts of the mountain. More attractive places among the mountains I did not visit, the road I did not travel and the mountains I did not climb have to be left for the later generations to finish.

Boundless Kunlun Mountains Stand Aloof

The "Classic of Mountains and Rivers" mentioned above is a geographic work written more than 2,000 years ago and contains many legends. The section about the Kunlun Mountain is a nice one. It reads that Gonggong props the Column of the Sky with his head. His action makes it angry and the Column of the Sky broke. Then the sky falls and the earth tilts, thus the land in northwest China is higher than southeast China. Standing in northwest China is the Kunlun Mountain. According to modern geologists the crash and insert of the Indian plate turn the plateau the roof of the world. Both the legend and the conclusion of the geologists are fascinating and attract people to explore the mountain.

If you start your trip from Kashi and go through Shufu and cross a vast desert, you will arrive at Upar Village at the foot of the Pamir Mountain. Out the village there is a flight of steps. Going up the steps along the Gez River Valley you come to the 3,000-meter-high Pamir Plateau. On the way the first wonderful scene coming to you is the alpine

Bulunkou Basin. The Gez River zigzags into a big lake here. Around the basin are grasslands, swamps and sand dunes. Here is a draught. The sand on the bottom of the basin always is blown into piles or is moved to be sand dunes on the slope. These sand hills, snow-clad peaks and lakes supplement each other and constitute a wonderful scene of the Pamir Plateau.

Going northwards for another 30 kilometers, you will arrive at the Kara Kol Lake. The lake is not big and only covers an area of 10 square kilometers and is inlaid on the 3,750-meter-high plateau. A typical glacier lake, it has blue water in the summer and reflects cows and sheep, yurts, snow-clad peaks and glaciers on the grasslands. Here you will see the three famous peaks of the Kunlun Mountain: Muztagata Peak, Kongur Peak and Kongur Tobe Peak. Seeing from the bank of the Kara Kol Lake, they are like huge barriers, tall and magnificent.



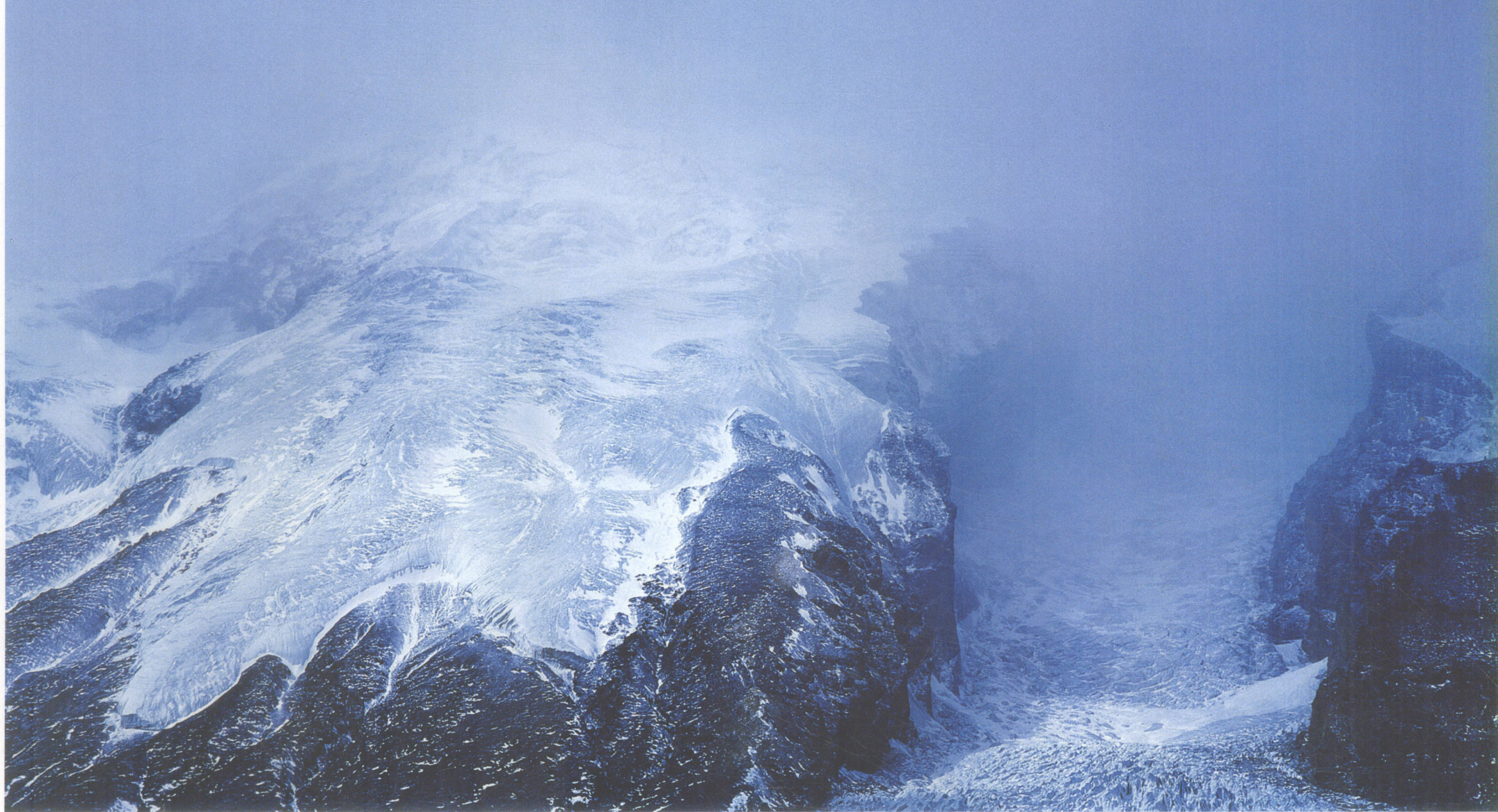
The Gez Valley in the mist is the only way to the Pamir Plateau.



The precipitous Arkaz Peak of the Kunlun Mountain.



The Kunlun Mountain surrounded by the mist makes you carefree and joyous.



Muztagata means the father of icebergs in Uygur language. Icebergs and glaciers are magnificent and wonderful.

Also these three peaks are the camp of glaciers. The vast areas around the West Kunlun and Pamir mountains have an elevation of more than 6,000 meters and those above 5,000 meters are covered by snow and those below 5,000 meters have a rainfall of 400-500 mm. The rainwater turns into ice or snow. The areas covered by snow extend for 200-300 square kilometers. The Muztagata Peak means the "father of icebergs" in local dialect.

Going southward from the Kara Kol you are close to the Muztagata Peak. At the Subas Daban, the Gez River and the Taxkorgan River separate. From here you can see clearly the icy crown, glaciers and icy waterfalls as well as the 1,000-meter-deep vertical canyon of peak. Occasionally you can see the soul-stirring snowstorms. Across

this mountain pass, you go down the mountain slope for some 60 kilometers and come to Taxkorgan County, which has the highest elevation in the region. This southern route to the Kunlun Mountain is the international highway to Pakistan and is the ideal tour route for mountaineering.

The Kunlun Mountain extends for 500 kilometers. I climbed up the mountain through two different routes and experienced worst weather and harsh conditions of roads. One time, I started from Yecheng County and passed a petroleum base in Kokyar before climbing up the mountain. My cross-country car arrived at the first sharp slope at the Arkaz Daban and I was shocked by the perilous conditions. In front of me were undulating ranges, narrow roads and steep slopes. The precipitous cliffs seem to collapse