

# THE GEOLOGY OF CHINA

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## PREFACE

THE present volume has largely developed out of a part of a series of lectures delivered in British Universities during the years 1934 and 1935, under the auspices of the Universities' China Committee in London. Although a certain amount of material has been added to each of the lectures which are here incorporated in Chapters I-IX, an attempt is made to maintain, as far as possible, the original method of presentation. If I have not failed in my objective, such a method of treatment may prove to be more palatable than presentation in text-book style. To meet the obvious requirements of serious students of Chinese Geology and field workers the essential data of stratigraphy are assembled in Chapter X in a simplified form.

Approaching the subject, as I try to, from the structural point of view, it has been felt necessary to consider the steps by which the basic conception of tectonic forms is arrived at. Comparative study of common tectonic types recognized in China naturally brings the whole world into our view; and in order to pursue the argument to a logical end an exploration into the borderland between Geology and Geophysics becomes inevitable. These aspects of the subject are briefly dealt with, but not without hesitation in a work of this nature.

Phonetic notations are not introduced in spelling the geographical names; for they are too numerous, and, if applied, would only increase the difficulty of reading; moreover, they do not necessarily convey the right pronunciation of the words.

It would be too long a list if I were to enumerate the names of my British friends and colleagues who have contributed illuminating discussions on different parts of the subject-matter. I have, therefore, to be content with a general acknowledgment, inadequate as it is.

My thanks are due to Dr. W. H. Wong, the Director of the Geological Survey of China, for free use of the publications of the Survey, including illustrations, and also to Mr. C. P. Liu, the Director of the Hunan Provincial Geological Survey, for similar reasons. I am indebted to Dr. Arnold Heim for his voluntary supply of valuable information regarding the remote regions of the west and extreme south of China, and to Dr. G. B. Barbour for his frank and friendly discussion on the treacherous problem of Pleistocene Climate. I am under obligation to Dr. L. D. Stamp for his active interest in the publication of this book, and to Messrs. Thomas Murby and Co. for their ready co-operation.

With the limited time at my disposal I could hardly have completed this work without the help of Dr. C. C. Yu in compiling the lists of references, and of Dr. H. D. Thomas, of the British Museum (Natural History), in undertaking the task of reading the proofs and compiling the index. No adequate expression of thanks can compensate for the drudgery of such work. I wish to thank Professor L. J. Wills for his help in many ways, especially for reading my manuscript, with valuable criticisms, of the chapter on Pleistocene Climate in China, and also for granting me the privilege of using the laboratory of the Geological Department of the University of Birmingham in conducting the preliminary experiments with a rotating hemisphere. In this connection I am indebted to Professor W. Cramp, of the Electrical Engineering Department of the same University, for his wise advice in avoiding certain mechanical difficulties incidental to high speed of rotation.

Finally, I must record my gratitude to Professor W. S. Boulton, who, in spite of heavy pressure of his own work, has kindly read through a large part of my manuscripts with many helpful critical remarks. Shortcomings in the sifting and arrangement of material and possible errors are, however, all mine. As one who often has to work under adverse conditions, I should like to mention especially the moral encouragement which I have received from Professor Boulton in carrying on geological research during my college days and ever since.

As the preparation of my manuscripts drew to an end there came the sad news of the loss of a friend and highly valued colleague, Dr. V. K. Ting. It is perhaps not out of place if I take this opportunity to pay a tribute to this man who worked so loyally for the development of geological science in China.

J. S. L.

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#### PUBLISHERS' NOTE

ARRANGEMENTS for the publication of this book were made while Professor Lee was lecturing in England in 1935. In 1936 he was recalled to China. Before he left England he placed in our hands the bulk of his Manuscript, the remainder being forwarded later. Owing to conditions which have since prevailed in China difficulties of communication between the Author and ourselves have caused serious delays.

To expedite the publication of the book, Dr. H. Dighton Thomas, who had undertaken to read the proofs, did much additional work in connection with the bibliographies, arranging for illustrations, and in dealing with numerous queries, which arose from time to time. We and the Author are indebted to him for all he has done in helping to make the publication of the book possible this year.

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July, 1939.

# CONTENTS

## PART I

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	NATURAL PROVINCES OF CHINA	1
	1. Tibetan Plateau	2
	2. Zongor and Tarim Basins	5
	3. Mongolian Steppe	10
	4. Manchurian Plain	12
	5. South-Eastern Highlands of Manchuria	12
	6. Shantung Peninsula	13
	7. North China Plain	14
	8. Shansi Plateau	16
	9. Shensi Basin	18
	10. Kansu Corridor	19
	11. Lower Yangtze Valley	20
	12. South-Eastern Maritime Province or South-Eastern Uplands	21
	13. Central Yangtze Basin	22
	14. Red Basin of Szechuan	25
	15. Kweichow Plateau	26
	16. Southern Maritime Province	27
	17. Kuangsi Platform	28
	18. South-Western Highlands	30
	19. Sikang Ranges or the Alps of Sino-Tibet	31
	China in Historical Times	31
	Selected Bibliography	40
II.	THE ANCIENT FLOOR OF CHINA	42
	A. Archæan	43
	B. Wutai System	57
	The Lulianian Revolution	65
	C. Sinian System	67
	Correlation	80
	Selected Bibliography	81
III.	MARINE TRANSGRESSIONS AND EPOCHS OF TECTONIC MOVEMENT	82
	Cambrian Transgressions	84
	Post-Cambrian or Intra-Ozarkian Disturbances	93
	Lower Ordovician Transgression	94
	Huaiyuanian Movement	100
	Middle Ordovician Transgression	103
	Late Ordovician Disturbance	107
	Silurian Transgression	108
	Caledonian Movement	114
	Devonian Transgressions	115
	Liukiang Disturbance	125
	Lower Carboniferous Transgressions	125
	Huainanian Movement	133
	Moscovian Transgression	133
	Kunming Movement	139

CHAP.	PAGE
Uralian and Lower Permian Transgressions	139
Tungwu Revolution	149
Middle and Upper Permian Transgressions	150
Triassic Transgression	152
Selected Bibliography	157
 IV. POST-PALÆOZOIC FORMATIONS AND THE YENSHAN	
MOVEMENTS	161
Triassic Continental Deposits	161
Kintzean or Huaiyang Movement	168
Nanhsiang Movement	169
Jurassic Deposits	170
Ningchinian Movement	175
Cretaceous Deposits	179
Later Phases of the Yenshan Movements	188
Early Tertiary Formations	190
Maoshan Movement	193
Late Tertiary and Early Quaternary Deposits and Disturbances	194
Post-Pliocene Disturbance	201
The Choukoutien Deposit	202
Selected Bibliography	207
 V. CATHAYSIAN GEOSYNCLINES AND GEANTICLINES	211
The Palæocathaysian Geosyncline and Palæocathaysia	211
Mesocathaysian Geosyncline	218
Neocathaysian Geosynclines and Geanticlines	220
The Great Khingan Range	223
The Luliang and Taihang Ranges	227
The Gorge Mountains of the Yangtze and the Eastern Kweichow Plateau	233
The Liaotung-Shantung Massif	239
The Minchew Geanticline	241
Summary	242
Selected Bibliography	244
 VI. EAST-WEST TECTONIC ZONES	247
The Inshan Zone	248
The Tsinling Zone	259
The Nanling Zone	273
Selected Bibliography	281
 VII. SHEAR-FORMS	282
A. The $\xi$ Type	283
B. The $\eta$ Type	291
1. The Wuling System	292
2. The Cordilleras of South-Eastern Asia	295
C. The $\epsilon$ Type	296
1. The Tainanlung System	298
2. The Huaiyin-Huaiyang System	301
3. The Pakang System	308
4. The Hsiangnan System	311
5. The Kuangsi System	314
6. The Amur System	316
Selected Bibliography	318

CHAP.		PAGE
VIII.	TECTONIC TYPES AND THEIR RELATED EARTH MOVEMENT	319
	General Considerations ... ..	319
	Facial Traits of the Earth and their Dynamic Significance ... ..	329
	Origin of Tectonic Movements and Marine Transgressions	351
	Selected Bibliography ... ..	365

## PART II

IX.	PLEISTOCENE CLIMATE IN CHINA	367
	Northern China ... ..	367
	The Yangtze Valley ... ..	376
	Lowering of the Snow-line over Eastern Asia in Pleistocene Time ... ..	395
	Addendum ... ..	398
	Selected Bibliography ... ..	399

X.	REGIONAL STRATIGRAPHY	400
	1. Mongolia ... ..	401
	2. North Manchuria ... ..	406
	3. South Manchuria ... ..	407
	4. Southern Khingan and Jehol ... ..	410
	5. Inshan Range ... ..	412
	6. North-Eastern Hopei ... ..	414
	7. Western Hills of Peking ... ..	417
	8. Eastern Shantung ... ..	420
	9. Western Shantung ... ..	421
	10. Northern Kiangsu ... ..	424
	11. Central Honan ... ..	425
	12. Northern Honan ... ..	426
	13. Central Taihang Range ... ..	428
	14. Northern Shansi ... ..	431
	15. Central Shansi ... ..	434
	16. Shensi Basin ... ..	437
	17. Alashan and Ordos ... ..	440
	18. Eastern Kansu ... ..	440
	19. North-Western Kansu ... ..	442
	20. Western Tsinling ... ..	443
	21. Eastern Part of the Middle Tsinling ... ..	444
	22. Northern Szechuan and Tapashan ... ..	445
	23. North-Western Hupeh ... ..	447
	24. Tapeishan, North-Eastern Hupeh ... ..	448
	25. Central and Western Hupeh ... ..	450
	26. South-Western Szechuan and the Red Basin ... ..	454
	27. Eastern Sikang ... ..	455
	28. South-Eastern Hupeh ... ..	456
	29. North-Western Kiangsi ... ..	457
	30. Lushan Area, Northern Kiangsi ... ..	459
	31. North-Eastern Kiangsi ... ..	460
	32. South-Western Kiangsi ... ..	461
	33. South-Eastern Kiangsi ... ..	462
	34. Southern Anhui ... ..	463
	35. Nanking Hills ... ..	466
	36. North-Western Chekiang ... ..	470
	37. Eastern Chekiang ... ..	472
	38. South-Western Chekiang ... ..	473



CHAP.								PAGE
X.	REGIONAL STRATIGRAPHY	(cont.)						
39.	Northern Fukien	...	...	...	...	...	...	474
40.	Southern Fukien	...	...	...	...	...	...	475
41.	Eastern Kuangtung	...	...	...	...	...	...	476
42.	Hong Kong and its Neighbourhood	...	...	...	...	...	...	477
43.	Northern Kuangtung	...	...	...	...	...	...	478
44.	Western Kuangtung	...	...	...	...	...	...	478
45.	Middle Part of the Eastern Nanling	...	...	...	...	...	...	480
46.	Mengchuling (Central Nanling)	...	...	...	...	...	...	481
47.	Tupangling (Central Nanling)	...	...	...	...	...	...	482
48.	Northern Kuangsi and Mid-Western Nanling	...	...	...	...	...	...	483
49.	Central and Eastern Hunan	...	...	...	...	...	...	485
50.	Kweichow Plateau	...	...	...	...	...	...	489
51.	Eastern and Central Yunnan	...	...	...	...	...	...	493
52.	South-Western Kuangsi	...	...	...	...	...	...	497
53.	Western Yunnan	...	...	...	...	...	...	499
	Selected Bibliography	...	...	...	...	...	...	501
	INDEX	...	...	...	...	...	...	507

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

FIG.		PAGE
1.	Map of China showing the natural provinces and the principal mountain ranges ... .. between	2-3
2.	A general view looking westward of the border of the Tibetan Plateau ... ..	3
3.	The town of Litang on the Tibetan Plateau ... ..	4
4.	Mean annual rainfall in China ... ..	6
5.	Distribution of isotherms in China ... ..	7
6.	A tentative soil map of China ... ..	8
7.	The Sintang Gorge, one of the Yangtze Gorges in Central China, looking westward ... ..	23
8.	Drowned valley near Hong Kong ... ..	27
9.	The Karst landscape near Kueilin, Kuangsi ... ..	29
10.	Six types of stone arrow heads, Yangshao Stage, Yangshaotsun, Mienchihsien, Honan ... ..	32
11.	A series of crude stone artefacts from the Yangshao cultural stratum, Yangshaotsun, Mienchihsien, Honan ... ..	32
12.	A well-known type of Yangshao pottery, generally identified with "li" of early historical times ... ..	33
13.	An urn believed to be of Yangshao Age ... ..	34
14.	Types of pottery of the Lungshan cultural stage ... ..	36
15.	An urn found in the Hsintien burial site, Kansu, representing the "Hsintien Stage" of post-Yangshao and pre-Bronze Age ... ..	37
16.	Map showing the distribution of Pre-Cambrian rocks in China... ..	44
17.	<i>Gymnosolen sinensis</i> Yang ... ..	59
18.	Section along the Chinglokolan road, between Hsimafangchen and Chinerhying (N.W. Shansi), showing the unconformity between the Sinian and the Wutai formations ... ..	66
19.	<i>Collenia cylindrica</i> Gr. ... ..	69
20.	Map showing the distribution of Lower Palæozoic and Devonian deposits in China ... ..	83
21.	a. & b. <i>Drepanura premesnili</i> Bergeron. c. <i>Redlichia chinensis</i> Walcott ... ..	84
22.	Cambrian fossils ... ..	85
23.	Cambrian brachiopods ... ..	89
24.	Cross-sections showing the approximate shape of the changing floor of the northern part of the Palæocathaysian Geosyncline during the Sinian-Ordovician periods ... ..	95
25.	Cross-sections showing the approximate shape of the floor of the southern Palæocathaysian Geosyncline during the Sinian-Ordovician periods ... ..	95
26.	An idealized section showing the Ordovician formations to the south of Tsinling, post-Ordovician folding being eliminated ... ..	95
27.	Ordovician graptolites ... ..	99
28.	Ordovician fossils ... ..	102
29.	<i>Yangtzeella poloi</i> (Martelli) ... ..	104
30.	<i>Encrinurus (Coronoccephalus) rex</i> Gr. ... ..	109
31.	Silurian fossils ... ..	112
32.	Section to the south-east of Changan, Yunghsien, northern Kuangsi, showing the pre-Devonian unconformity due to Caledonian movements ... ..	115

FIG.		PAGE
33.	Devonian fossils ...	118
34.	A hypothetical section of the Devonian floor at the end of the Devonian period ...	122
35.	Map showing the distribution of Carboniferous, Permian and Triassic deposits in China ...	126
36.	Lower Carboniferous fossils ...	128
37.	A diagram showing the correlation of Lower Carboniferous formations in different parts of China ...	132
38.	A generalized section of the Middle Carboniferous-Permian formations ...	134
39.	Middle Carboniferous and Uralian fossils ...	136
40.	Uralian and Permian fusulinids ...	142
41.	Upper Palaeozoic plants ...	143
42.	Permian fossils ...	148
43.	Geological map and section of the Chinglungshan, south-east of Nanking ...	150
44.	Triassic and questionably Jurassic marine fossils ...	153
45.	Mesozoic fossils ...	164
46.	Skull of <i>Lystrosaurus murrayi</i> (Huxley) ...	166
47.	Section across the Chihsiahsan, near Nanking, showing the pre-Jurassic unconformity ...	169
48.	Map showing the distribution of post-Triassic deposits in China ...	171
49.	Section of the Kênkou district, eastern Nanking ...	178
50.	Section of Shichung, south of Lungyen (south-eastern Fukien), showing the pre-Cretaceous unconformity ...	178
51.	Cretaceous fossils ...	180
52.	Cross-section in southern China of the Cretaceous floor at the end of the Cretaceous period ...	181
53.	A section across northern China showing the approximate shape of the Cretaceous floor at the end of the Cretaceous period ...	181
54.	<i>Mesoclupea showchanensis</i> Ping and Yen ...	187
55.	Left upper cheek-teeth of <i>Hipparion richthofeni</i> Koken ...	195
56.	Top and occipital views of three <i>Siphneus</i> skulls ...	196
57.	Pliocene mollusca ...	198
58.	Skull of <i>Sinanthropus</i> from Choukoutien, near Peking ...	201
59.	Dioptrographic reconstructions of the adult <i>Sinanthropus</i> jaw ...	203
60.	A small chopper in greenstone from Choukoutien, near Peking ...	204
61.	Hypothetical restoration of the general trend of the Palaeo- and Meso- cathaysian Geosynclines and other related features. a, late Sinian; b, Middle Ordovician; c, Devonian; d, Triassic ...	212
62.	A sketch map showing the structure of the southern Great Khingan Range ...	223
63.	A tectonic map of Shansi ...	228
64.	A section across the north-western border of the South-Eastern Uplands, Southern Anhui ...	241
65.	Isanomales of Northern China ...	243
66.	A simplified tectonic map of Eastern Asia ...	between 246-247
67.	Tectonic map of the Inshan Range showing thrusts and faults ...	249
68.	Tectonic map of the western Tsinling and Tapashan ...	260
69.	Dominant structural directrices and granitic bodies of the middle part of the Nanling ...	272
70.	Parallel folds of the $\xi$ type produced on wet paper by a simple shear ...	283
71.	Geological map of the Lientaishan area, north-western Hohsien, Anhui, showing the $\xi$ type of structure ...	285
72.	Folds of the $\eta$ type, produced on a sheet of wet paper by fixing the paper and applying a twisting movement ...	291
73.	Geological map of the Chuanhsien district, south-west of the Hsiang-kuei Gap, showing a part of the Wuling system of the $\eta$ type ...	292

FIG.		PAGE
74.	A typical type of structure, produced on wet and moderately soft tissue paper ... ..	297
75.	A simplified tectonic map of the Nanking-Chinkiang area, showing the reflex $\epsilon$ type of structure superimposed upon the Cathaysian folds ... ..	306
76.	Major structural pattern of the northern Hemisphere ... ..	332
77.	An experiment with a layer of softened cellulose-lead mixture attached to the concave side of a rotating hollow hemisphere ... ..	353
78.	Diagram illustrating the experiment with a rotating hemisphere ... ..	354
79.	A graphic representation of important tectonic movements and extensive marine transgressions throughout geological times ... ..	360
80.	A striated boulder of Jurassic sandstone found in the Tatung Basin, northern Shansi ... ..	372
81.	Shape of the floor on which rests the clay and boulder deposit on the eastern side of the Lushan ... ..	376
82.	Striated surface produced on the Middle Carboniferous limestone, east of the Lushan ... ..	377
83.	Striated boulder found in the western valley of the Lushan ... ..	380
84.	General view of the Wangchiapo Valley, northern Lushan, looking eastward ... ..	381
85.	An artificial exposure of clay-and-boulder deposit on the Tungliu Terrace, showing subangular erratics and the unstratified nature of the deposit ... ..	383
86.	Clay-and-boulder deposit on the Tungliu Terrace, Central Yangtze, with jagged boulders of silicified limestone of distant origin ... ..	384
87.	The cirque-like depression on the top of the Kiuhuashan, southern Anhui, with a U-shaped valley leading to the north ... ..	386
88.	The Tsienmaotien depression on the top of the northern part of the Tienmongshan, northern Chekiang, half-filled with clays ... ..	388
89.	The U-shaped saddle between the Tsienmaotien depression and the U-shaped valley on its eastern side ... ..	389
90.	A dry U-shaped valley (descending eastwards) from the Tsienmaotien depression ... ..	390
91.	Pachotsien, on the northern foot of the Tienmongshan, showing the form of a nivation cirque ... ..	391
92.	Najambö Gongkar and Great Gomba Glacier ... ..	396
93.	Key map to regions ... .. facing	401

# PART I

## CHAPTER I

### NATURAL PROVINCES OF CHINA

THE physical features of a country represent the sum total of the constructive, deformative and erosive processes that have operated in that country throughout geological time. Surface expression of the physical features often affords useful landmarks for tracing out the evolution of such features. No apology is therefore needed for dealing with the outline of the physical geography of China before we proceed to inquire into its geological history. This procedure seems all the more natural, and perhaps necessary, when we realize that the physical evolution of China has been largely based on a framework that was already laid down in Pre-Cambrian times. The existing features, though they came into existence at much later dates, conform in their general arrangement with that ancient framework.

As viewed in its present relief, China embraces an expanse of land-mass in eastern Asia which half encircles the stupendous massif of Tibet, or "the roof of the world", forming a staircase, as it were, that generally steps down towards the shelf-seas bordering the Pacific. The staircase does not, however, follow exactly the semi-circular arrangement, but is warped, distorted, shattered and sculptured according to a definite plan. As the stairs recede from the central plateau, their trend markedly departs from the shape of the nuclear platform. A decisive step can be traced across China from the north-east to the south-west consisting of the Great Khingan, the Taihang Range and the eastern border of the Kweichow Plateau. This is followed on the

east by a belt of depression covering the Sungari-Liaoho Valley, the great plain of North China and the Central Yangtze Basin. Further east, this depressed area is followed by the notably elevated land-masses of the South-Eastern Highlands of Manchuria and Shantung and of the south-eastern coastal belt embracing the area of southern Chekiang, Fukien and north-eastern Kuangtung.

Across these stretches of elevated and depressed areas are laid, at intervals, mountain ranges or watersheds that run approximately from west to east. Through these mighty ranges China is divided into several latitudinal segments, each of which, speaking generally, becomes more elevated compared with the next one to the south. The northernmost of the west-east ranges within China is the Inshan Range separating Mongolia from northern China. The next to the south is the Tsinling Range forming the natural divide between northern China, or the drainage basin of the Huangho, and the Yangtze Valley. The Nanling Range is the southernmost representative of this group of ranges and separates the valleys of the Sikiang, Peikiang and Tungkiang from the drainage basin of the Yangtze. It is these ranges, together with the Tibetan Plateau standing on the west, that have forced all the mighty rivers of China to flow from the west to the east. It is also these ranges that have naturally sharpened the climatic contrasts and regional differences in other geographical conditions, against which the Chinese have struggled for their unity during historical times through the binding influence of a distinctive culture. Having this broad framework in view, we now proceed to consider the several physiographical units of China, including the adjoining areas.

#### I. TIBETAN PLATEAU

The pear-shaped mass of Tibet forms a vast plateau over 5,000 m. in average altitude. The whole plateau is surrounded by highly folded mountain ranges on all sides, and is itself traversed by long rows of mountains having their peaks falling in a curved alignment from west to east. Some of the aligned mountain masses well deserve to be

treated as mountain ranges in the ordinary geographical sense. Their geological structure is, however, still ill-understood in most cases. In the northern part of the plateau the ranges run more nearly east-west; but in the southern part the dominant ranges generally follow the Himalayan curve.

The northern border of the plateau is defined by the Kuenlun Range forming a rather sharp step by which the plateau descends to the Tarim and Tsaidam Basins on the north. Several ranges appear on the southern side of the



FIG. 2. A general view looking westward of the border of the Tibetan Plateau. (By courtesy of DR. ARNOLD HEIM.)

Kuenlun generally running parallel to the latter. Two of these appear to be quite impressive and persistent in their east-west trend. The northern one is the Kokoshili Mountain, which is probably continued farther east by the Bayen Kara Mountain slightly turned to the south of east. The southern one, even more dominating, is named the Buka Magna Dungburg Mountain. Lesser ranges of similar trend are developed farther south.

On the east, a series of high ranges marks the foreland of the plateau. These are usually styled the "Alps of Sino-Tibet". They curve into the eastern part of the

plateau from the western part of Sikang Province and the north-western part of Yunnan, gradually changing their trend from north-north-west to north-west as they enter into the plateau. Ranges allied to these run nearly meridionally in the eastern part of Sikang and north-western Yunnan.

On the southern side, the boundary between Tibet and Himalaya is marked by three ranges partly in linear succession. The western one is the Zaskar Range with the Great Himalaya on its south-western side and the Ladakh



FIG. 3. The town of Litang on the Tibetan Plateau. (By courtesy of DR. ARNOLD HEIM.)

Range on its north-eastern side running parallel to one another. In the neighbourhood of Lake Manasarowar, the Zaskar joins the Great Himalaya, and is overtaken by the Ladakh. East of Manasarowar, the Ladakh itself marks the boundary of Tibet, extending farther east to the Nepal-Tibet watershed. Thus the eastern extension of the Ladakh, together with the Nepal-Tibet watershed, forms the central part of the southern boundary of the plateau. The eastern part of the boundary lies in the Nyenchen-tang-Lha, an imposing range running east-north-east on the northern side of the upper Brahmaputra.



Some fifty miles north of the Ladakh stands a parallel range named the Kailas, essentially a granite mountain about 20,000 feet high and twenty miles broad. To the north-east of this range and north-west of the Nyenchen-tang-Lha lies a mountainous region defined on the north by the Aling-Kangri Range. This so-called Trans-Himalayan area, about 140 miles wide in its central part, extends between the latitudes of  $29^{\circ}$  and  $31^{\circ}$  N. and longitudes  $81^{\circ}$  and  $91^{\circ}$  E., with an altitude varying from 17,500 to 19,300 feet. According to Sven Hedin, this region forms the watershed between the Indian Ocean on the south and the enclosed drainage on the north. Irregular masses of mountain dominate the area; and highly complex folding of the rocks characterizes its structure.

The northern and southern boundary ranges and the Himalaya are pressed together in the western end of the Tibetan Plateau, demonstrating the phenomenon of "scharung," or bundling of mountains, on a gigantic scale. The Hindu Kush coming from the west is squeezed into this huge bundle of mountain ranges, and is continued eastward by the famous Karakorum Range stretching into the heart of the Tibetan Plateau. Fossiliferous deposits ranging from Carboniferous to Triassic in age are folded in this mighty range. This and other facts indicate that the plateau has had a more complicated history than is usually supposed.

In spite of a continued desiccation over the whole area, large and small glaciers still exist in the high mountains, and numerous lakes occur in the lower ground. The latter are generally believed to have originated from damming up of the streams by detrital material fallen from the mountain flanks. Earth movement in recent times, however, may have played a part in the formation of some of the lakes.

## 2. ZONGOR AND TARIM BASINS

The province of Sinkiang, or Chinese Turkestan, is divided into two large basins by the Tianshan emerging from Central Asia. The southern, or the Tarim Basin, is largely occupied by the Takla Makan desert in its eastern part. Population tends to gather round places dotted along