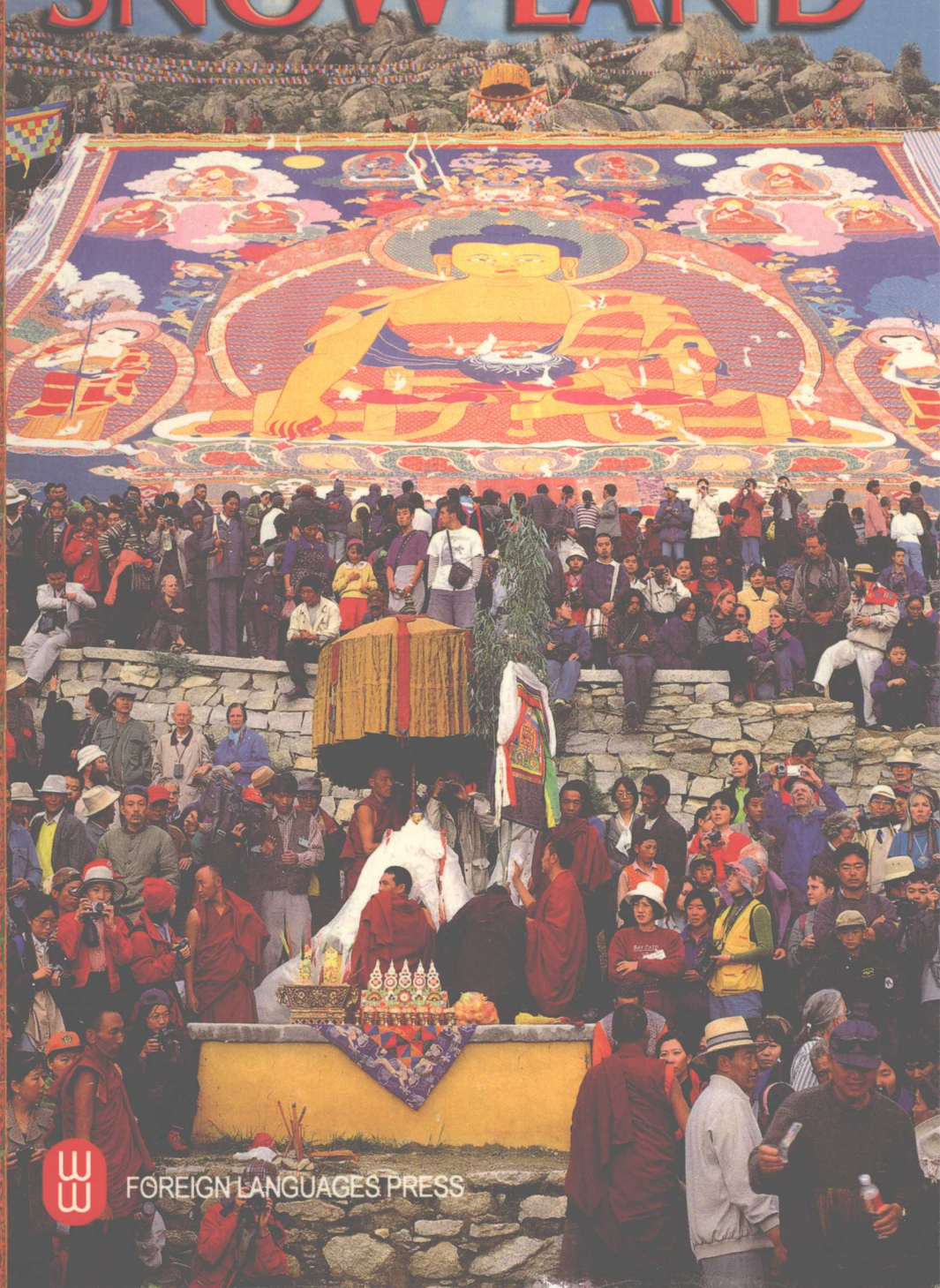


全景中国 PANORAMIC CHINA

# DREAMS OF SNOW LAND



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

PANORAMIC CHINA

# Dreams of Snow Land



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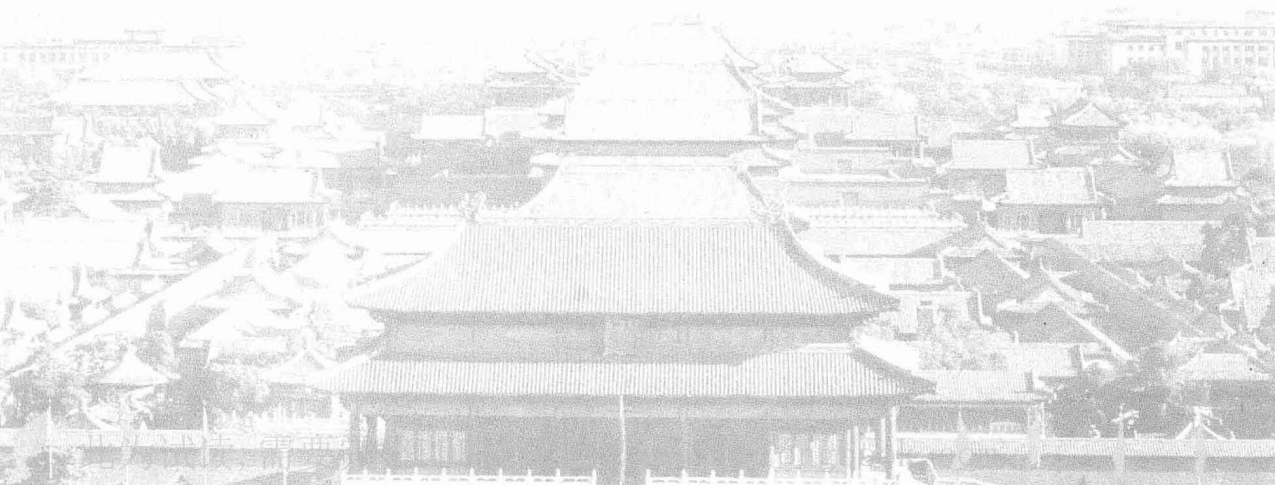


# Introduction

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.

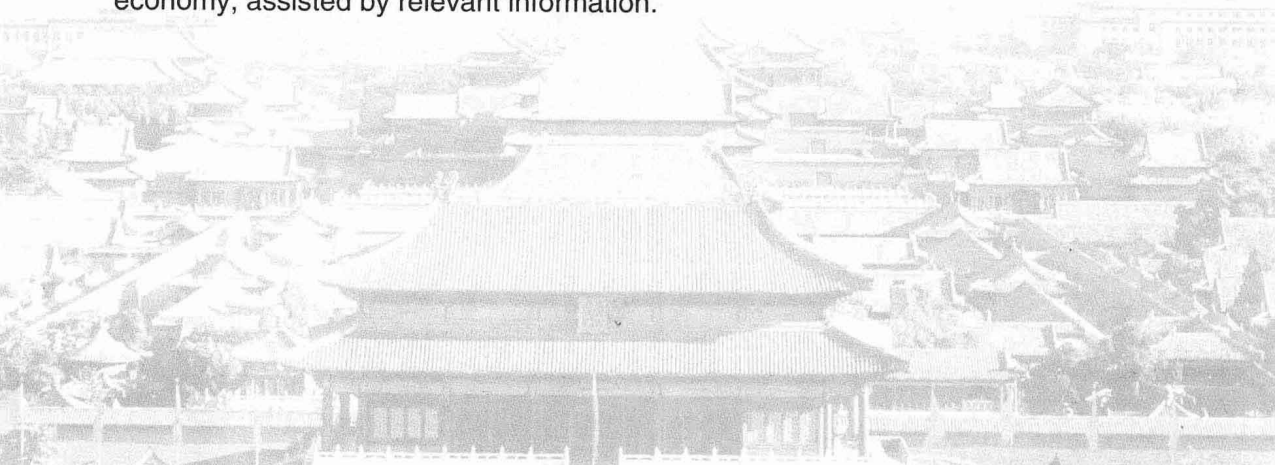
China boasts 5,000 years of recorded civilization and a brilliant culture. The country is home to such world-renowned cultural treasures as the Great Wall, terracotta warriors and horses of the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, Mogao Grottoes at Dunhuang, and Ming and Qing imperial palaces and mausoleums, 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 the Tibet Autonomous  
Region in the People's Republic of China



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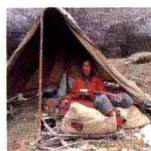
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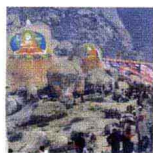
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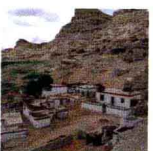
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# Preface

Of all the places I have ever visited, it has the bluest skies, the highest mountains, the vastest landscapes, the longest history, the most numerous temples, the most distinct customs and most honest people.... This is the Tibet imprinted in my mind.

The allure of the stark solitude, mystery, simplicity and virginity of the world's highest plateau has always held me in its grip. Since I finally set foot on it in 1987, I have never shaken off the fantasies and dreams it generates, each one distinct and different and always giving me something enjoyable and exciting. Even on waking, I longed to re-enter those dreams, because everything they offered is real. So for a second time, then a third and many times since, I have kept returning to their source. I've followed my dream for so long now, Tibet has become part of my life and a second home.

Everywhere in the sacred city of Lhasa—whether walking along Parkor Street that surrounds the Zuglakang Monastery, or strolling on the world's highest square in front of the Potala Palace, the distinctness of the snow land people and the magnitude of their history can stir your emotions.

In Xigaza in U-Tsang you can experience for yourself Qomolangma (Mount Everest) the world's highest mountain – or the exotic frontier towns of Zham and Yadong. A 1,800-km journey from Lhasa, Ngari in western Tibet is the “roof on top of the roof

of the world.” During its heyday the vastness of the ancient Guge Kingdom in Zanda was inhabited by over 100,000 people; today it is deserted, looked after by one solitary custodian. Three religions – Tibetan Buddhism, the indigenous Bon religion and Hinduism all worship Kangrinboqe, the highest peak of the Kangdese Mountains, as sacred. There are other sites to see as well – Banggong Lake Bird Island, rich wildlife, Donggar's murals and the 500-year-old international market at Purang.

Shannan is the cradle of the Tibetan people. It boasts Tibet's first palace – Yumbu Lhakang, the oldest monastery – Samye, and the tomb of a Tibetan king with its precious pearl thangka – the only one extant in Tibet.

The Qiangtang Grassland in northern Tibet extends as far as the eye can see. Within its 100,000 square kilometers is No-man's Land, an austere habitat where not a single tree grows, but where Tibetan antelope, wild yak, Tibetan wild ass and other wildlife live.

Eastern Tibet's Nyingchi is an oasis on the snowy plateau, this subtropical valley area being referred to as “the Yangtze Valley of Tibet.” Here are the Great Canyon of Yarlung Zangbo – the world's largest, and the “solitary alpine island” of Medog, the only county in China without road access.

Qamdo, also in eastern Tibet, is an expanse of mountains – hill upon hill and range upon range of them. The special geological structure of the magnificent Hengduan Mountains creates the spectacle of the three famous rivers – Jinsha, Lancang and Nujiang – running side by side.

The unique geology of this 1.2 million square kilometer snow plateau, its splendid history and culture, its vital and primitive folklore, and, above all, its soul-invested mountains, lakes and temples – these are the things I can't tear myself away from and can't stop recording with camera and pen. They have allowed me experience for myself what "heart-quake" is, and how one's soul can achieve insight and satisfaction.

Over the past 15 years, I have made 19 trips to Tibet and traveled the Sichuan-Tibet, Qinghai-Tibet, Yunnan-Tibet, Xinjiang-Tibet and China-Nepal highways. I've been twice to No-man's Land in northern Tibet, to the Everest Nature Reserve three times, and four times to the frontier towns of Zham and Yadong. In 1997 I went to Ngari and stayed with the keeper of the Guge Kingdom ruins, and later joined Chinese and foreign pilgrims who circumambulated the sacred Kangrinboqe, the summit of the Kingdome Mountains, that reach altitudes from 5,200 to 5,700 meters. In 1999 I trekked through the Yarlung Zangbo Canyon into Medog, the only county in China inaccessible by road. Since 1987 I have served as an on-site reporter and witnessed almost all Tibet's major events and occasions: the last journey of the 10th

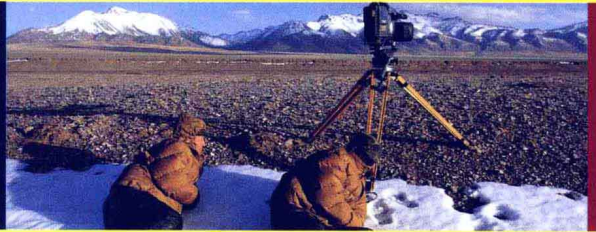
Panchen Lama around Tibet in 1989, and his death; in 1991, the 40th anniversary of the Tibet's Peaceful Liberation; in 1993, the opening ceremony of the funerary stupa of the 10th Panchen Lama; in 1995, the 30th anniversary of the founding of Tibet Autonomous Region, and, in November the same year, the lot-drawing and enthronement of the 11th Panchen Lama. I am very lucky to be the only reporter to witness the entire sequence of events from the death of the 10th Panchen Lama to the reincarnation of the 11th Panchen Lama. In July 2001 I went with the Central Government delegation to attend the 50th anniversary celebrations of the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet. In June 2002, once again I entered Tibet and witnessed the ceremony on the 13th birthday anniversary of the 11th Panchen Lama. To date I have traveled in 70 of the 74 counties in Tibet's seven prefectures and collected a mass of information and photographs. In all I have spent over a thousand days in Tibet.

I appreciate the efforts of the *Panoramic China* editorial board in publishing the English edition of this album, which is a realistic record of some of my Tibetan experiences, and which includes 14 photographic subjects with almost 200 photos reflecting human and ecological conditions in some of Tibet's remote areas.

Cheng Weidong  
January 1 2005, Beijing

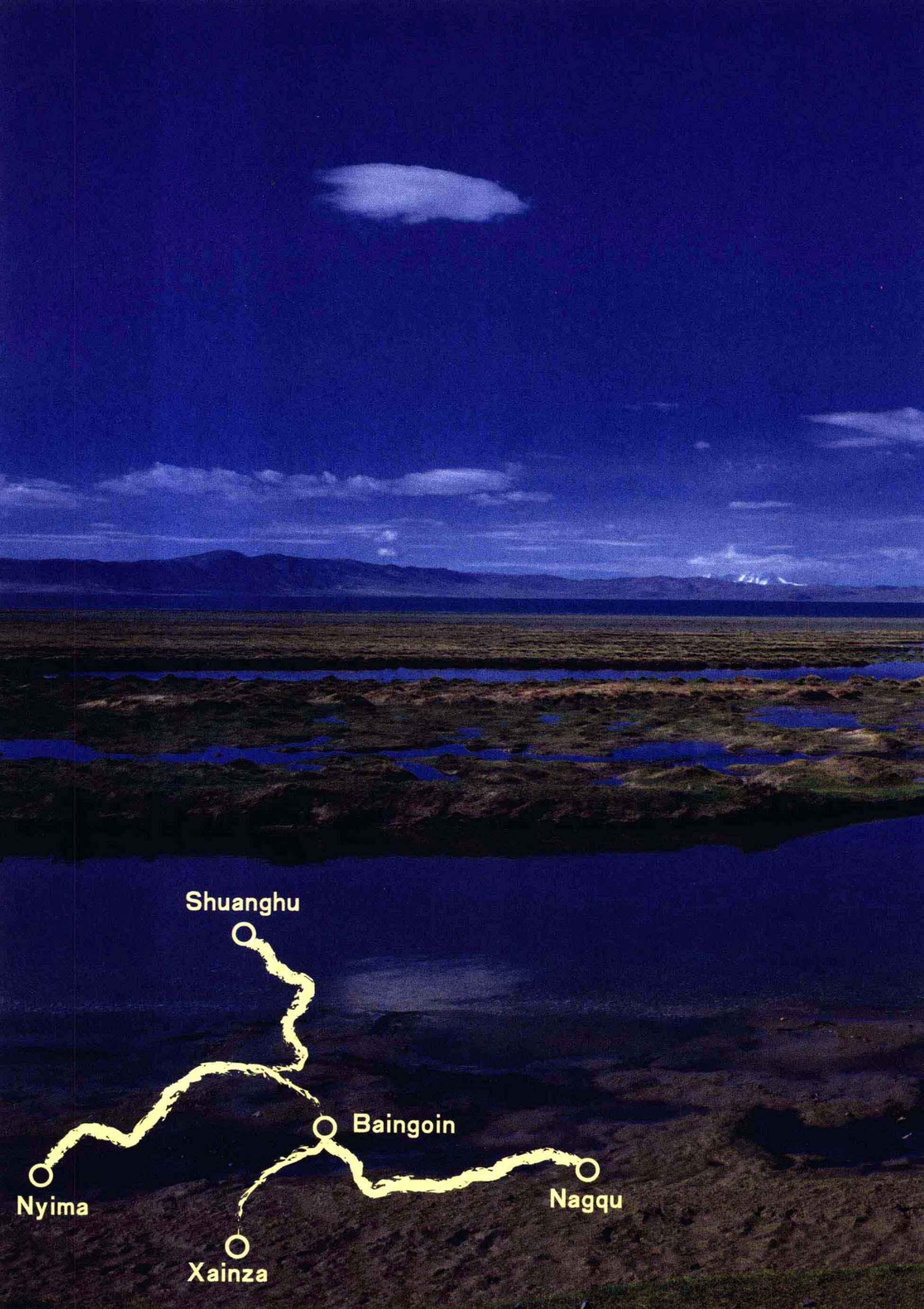


# Intruders in No-man's Land



There is no human life and no tree in sight for hundreds of thousands of kilometers, but this austere zone that forbids human inhabitation nurtures and shelters many rare Qinghai-Tibet Plateau species. Though not their ideal habitat, it makes their survival possible.





Shuanghu

Baingoin

Nyima

Xainza

Nagqu





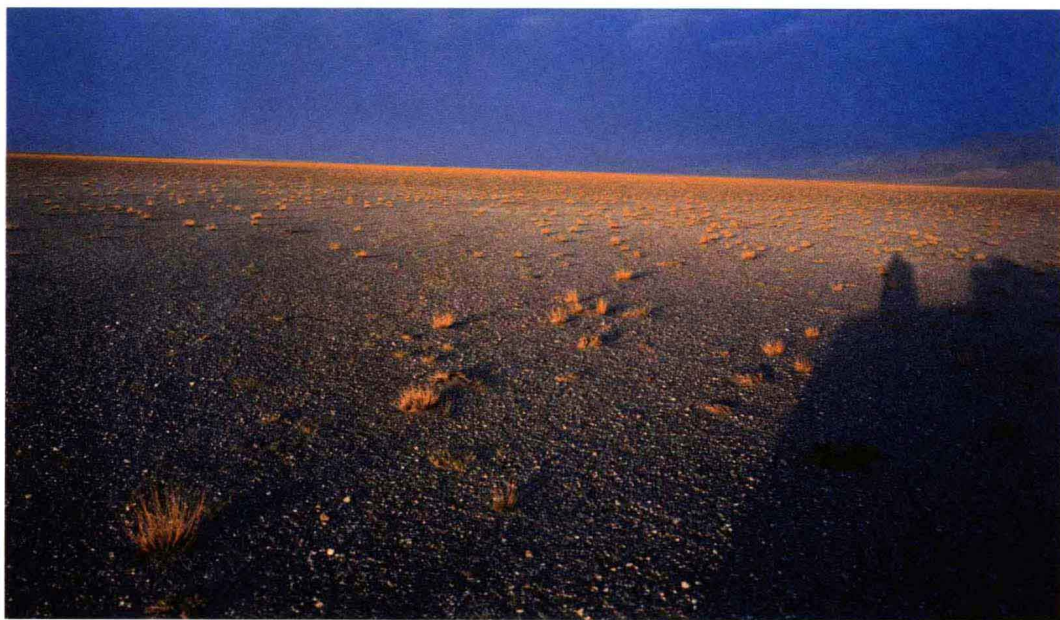


In the northern part of Tibet Autonomous Region there is an expanse of land known as Qiangtang, meaning “Northern Plain” in Tibetan. With an average altitude of 4,500 meters, its climate is rigorous and the air thin, making it off-limits for human habitation. The place is therefore called No-man’s Land and at its mention locals shake their heads. In 1999 I braved this area twice to look for signs of life and to experience and test the tenacity of human life in extreme conditions.

It was in May that I made my first trip to this place closest to Earth’s atmosphere. Our team started at Nagqu, a large town in northern Tibet,

and headed northward along the Qinghai-Tibet Highway. After driving for about 50 kilometers my jeep turned off the main road onto a packed earth track that runs northwestward to Babgoin, Xainza, Nyima, Shuanghu and finally No-man’s Land. It was spring, when warm breezes would have brought flowers into blossom in more central areas, but here northerly gales swept across the barren and desolate wilderness and as we left signs of human habitation further behind, anxiety began to invade my excitement. I had made careful preparation for this trip; a tent, sleeping bag, down coat, a heavy military-use calf-length overcoat of leather, flashlight, and canned food.

Desolate Gobi in No-man’s Land.



- Swamps are a main feature of No-man’s Land that make possible the survival and continuity of wildlife.





There are many salt lakes in No-man's Land.

Wild flowers and plants clinging tenaciously to the barren, gravelly earth.

A hot spring in No-man's Land.

I had thought I was more than adequately equipped, but before departure I was told that my luggage needed adding to. In particular, the organizer cautioned against altitude sickness and cold, which can easily lead to plateau pneumonic edema and death. This warning made me a little nervous so I packed another set of bedding and a felt mattress. The Nagqu Forestry Security Branch Bureau sent eleven fully armed policemen to escort us. They had a double mission; acting as our guides and protectors and making a No-man's





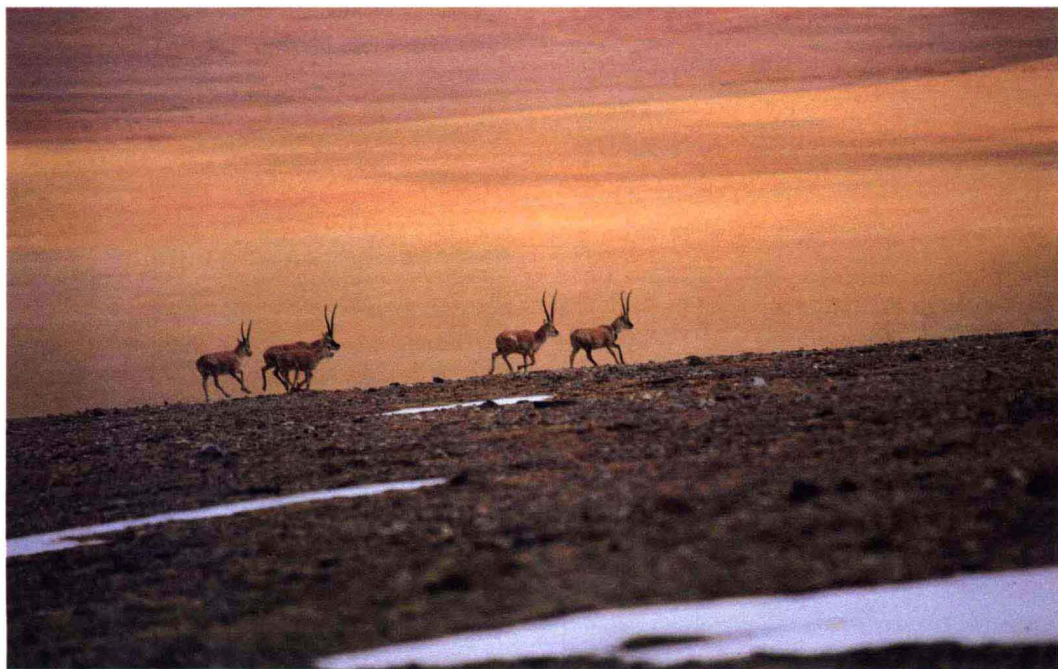
Land wildlife protection and investigation tour. I felt much safer with them around.

The desolate No-man's Land has a solemn and virgin beauty. Its lakes, swamps, rivers and grassland create a



Camping near water in No-man's Land.

Long-horned male Tibetan antelope numbers are very limited.



Cars often get bogged down in this area.

wilderness that sustains many rare wildlife species and is the world's largest wildlife reserve in terms of numbers and diversity. Tibetan antelope, wild yak and Tibetan wild ass are the three largest species that predominate. In fact Qiangtang is geographically connected with Hoh Xil in Qinghai Province, but is luckier, as its eco-environment shows little sign of human croachment. The local government has strengthened