



# These Wonderful People of Xinjiang

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## Introduction



It was 1993, the first time. I was accompanying one of my students of Italian to her hometown, Urumqi, for the summer holidays. We reached our destination after 72 hours on the train. In the passing years, rail transportation has improved to the point where one can make the distance in 60 hours, and 48 hours, presently. Living conditions have also improved and more people travel by plane now.

The second time, it was 2005; then, I spent 11 days in Xinjiang. Today, July 4, 2007, I leave Beijing to realize a long-harbored dream: to live in Xinjiang for more than one month. In three and a half hours, I fly the 2,842 km between the two airports.

The sky is blue... a glowing and indefinable blue. We fly over a layer of clouds that look like a flock of sheep. And immediately I see myself among the sheep breeders on the summer pasture. And when I see another kind of cloud formation, like cotton balls, I am transported to the eternal snows of the 18,600 glaciers, big and small, of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Elsewhere, a flat sheet of immaculate white is pierced by peaks of

“whipped cream,” which remind me of yurts (tent houses).

Suddenly, between the clouds, I see spots of ochre: the desert. They become larger and larger. There are no longer any clouds, only sand. The desert... sometimes as flat as a beach, sometimes striated with scars left by the wind or with the 600 km of roads that once served mainly for oil transportation, or sometimes covered with dunes as in images from my childhood. Yesterday, the *China Daily* newspaper reported on the increasingly serious desertification in Xinjiang – 1.03 million sq km in this region suffer greatly from land erosion. Desertification affects 80 out of the 90 counties and cities and almost two-thirds of the territory. At least 12 million persons suffer the consequences – from the lack of drinkable water to the soil aridity. Sand occupies one-third of the reservoirs’ capacity, and at least one-third of the arable land has become salt marsh. The desert area expands by 100 sq km a year. Also, to avoid the silting of the roads, herbs have been planted in square plots to dam the sand and, in some places, the herbs have succeeded in “greening” the area. This is visible from high in the air, in the middle of nowhere. In the last six years, 2.3 billion sq m of water have been diverted to save the threatened vegetation along the Tarim River. Xinjiang has controlled erosion on more than 5,700 sq km of land. There is hope then.



It is in this region covering one-sixth of China's territory where 55 of the 56 nationalities, who compose the Chinese nation (all of them except the Jino), now live, where I have come to meet "ordinary" people, and find what is extraordinary in them - these wonderful Xinjiang people.

(Boarding flight CUA-2273)

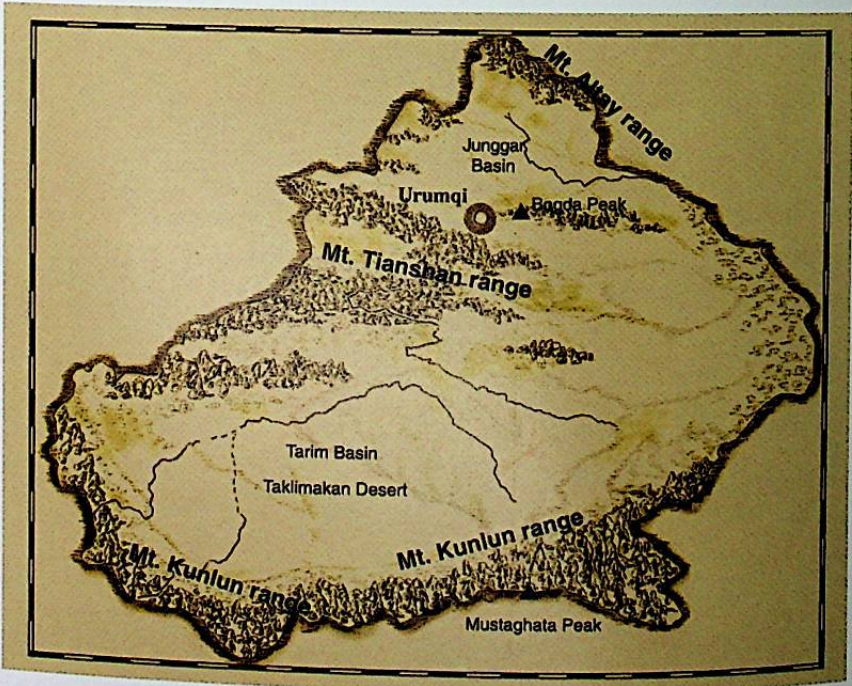




# Location of Xinjiang within China



# Relief Map of Xinjiang





**A**fter a teaching career in Canada, where she was born, Lisa Carducci found China to be the most favourable place for her writing. Author of more than 40 books and 2,000 articles, she aims to improve, year after year, her knowledge of the Chinese culture's many diverse features. However, this experience of China would not make sense to her if she did not share it with "those who don't have the chance to discover it on the ground."

In 2001, Lisa Carducci was granted the Friendship Award of the People's Republic of China, and, in 2005, permanent residence status.



With unique mystery, Xinjiang includes landscapes of extremes. With the hottest and the driest places of China, the largest of the country's deserts, and the world's lowest depression, Xinjiang is also home to wonderful people. Lisa Carducci has woven an exceptional tapestry of both the people and the region, both interconnected in their amazing intensity and charm. A border guard, an imam, a photographer, a restaurateur, a melon scientist, and a mountain climber are just a few of the outstanding characters that Lisa describes in gentle detail.

The remarkable personalities and the landscape will draw you in and leave a lasting impression. The engaging spirit of the land and the energy and enthusiasm of the people will make their way into your heart, as it understandably did into the author's, and will capture your imagination and affection. After turning the last page of this fascinating and informative read, you will want to travel to Xinjiang's exotic locales and to experience the colorful local customs.

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