

Xinjiang

Foreword

'Xinjiang, Our Dear Beautiful land,' a song pulsing with melodious Uyghur cadences, excites the fancy of many for this exotic land.

Xinjiang is both old and young, common yet mysterious. Its brilliant ancient culture, colorful traditions, magnificent mountains and boundless deserts have touched travellers' heartstrings. This pictorial, published on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, will reveal to armchair travellers a glimpse of this fabled land of China.

Tucked away in China's northwestern corner, Xinjiang now ranks behind other areas in economic and cultural development. However, as early as the Han and Tang dynasties, Xinjiang's economy and culture flourished through wide contacts with the hinterland. Today, a great number of historical sites and a wealth of cultural relics await visitors. They include the sites of the 2,000-year-old cities of Gaochang and Jiaohe, over 1,000 Buddhist grottoes scattered along southern and northern Xinjiang, and the relics of the world famous Silk Road. They form a brilliant scroll of ancient Xinjiang and bear witness to the interflow of Chinese and foreign civilizations.

Xinjiang, after all, is young. While New China is over 35 years old, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is just marking its 30th birthday. It is in its prime. Come to Urumqi, the capital of the region, and see the towering buildings, tree-lined asphalt roads flowing with modern traffic, rows of stores and emporiums and construction sites with the roar of machines. The modern city sweeps away the image of the ancient border town that often lingers in people's mind. Likewise, modernization is changing the Islamic city of Kashi in the west, the border city of Ining in the northwest, Hotan on the margin of the desert, Taxkorgan, capital of the Tajik Autonomous County on the untraversed Pamir Plateau and the new city of Shihezi in the interior of the Junggar Desert. Karamay, the petroleum city of national fame, and the vast mechanized farms and ranches in the Tarim and Junggar basins testify to the vitality of this primordial wilderness.

Out of the ordinary emerges the extraordinary. Cruising along the fringe of the limitless gobi where nothing meets the eye except the solitude and monotony of the grey boulders and naked dunes, a tantalizing oasis gradually comes into view. At first a straggles of trees, then shelterbelts and irrigation ditches usher in an entirely new world with green groves, gurgling streams and crisscrossing fields, reminiscent of gardens in the south.

It is true that instead of the wooded mountains and limpid rivers that grace the south China landscapes, Xinjiang flaunts only the 'brown dragon,' with its lofty ice-capped peaks and snow mountains and a kaleidoscope of geological structures. Travellers penetrating the mountain

recesses are rewarded with natural wonders—a forest sea made up of spruces, larches and Korean pines, the expansive Bosten Lake, the picturesque Sayram Lake, the limpid Tianqi Lake, and the Tarim, Kax, Konqi, Kaidu, and Ili rivers.

The region's nature preserves, established with the approval of the autonomous government, harbor many rare birds and animals, and beautiful scenes.

The mysteries of Xinjiang also lie in its many unexplored secrets of nature, such as the Pamirs, known as the roof of the world, and Akdingkol Lake, more than 150 meters below sea level. The karez, an underground irrigation system to draw the snowmelt from the Tianshan Mountains to water the oases, intrigues visitors. The pretty little birds and dragonflies active in the interior of the Taklimakan desert, the 'sea of death,' and the land tortoise that burrows under the sand, puzzle visitors. The saussurea that blossoms in world of ice and snow and the galloping wild asses and camels in the desert also delight travellers.

Xinjiang is a multi-ethnic region, the home of more than 40 nationalities. Their distinctive lifestyles and colorful customs and traditions attract ethnologists and sociologists. Come to a Uygur village and enjoy watching Dolan, a sprightly collective dance, and the graceful Maxrap. The young people's fullthroated singing and lively dance express their love of their traditional art.

If you hanker after the grassland, go and watch 'sheep-snatch' and 'girl's chase' by the Kazaks, the 'people on horseback,' or the wrestling and horse races of the Mongolians. You will be impressed by their superb horsemanship.

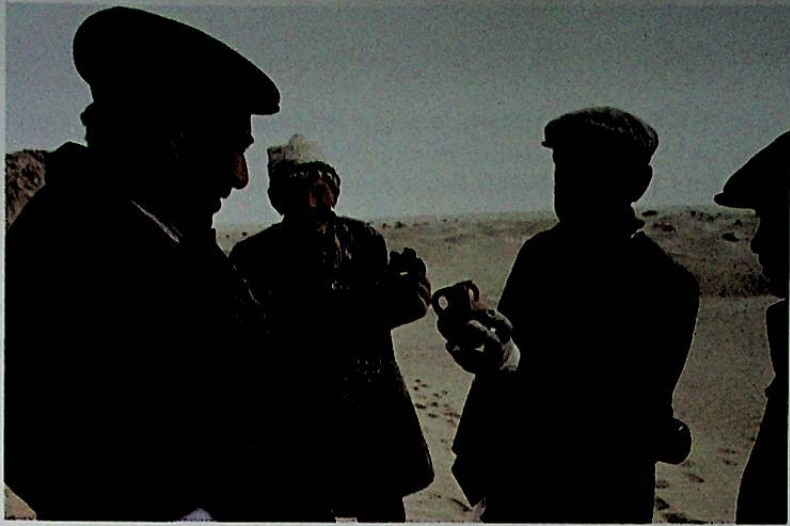
The grassland stretches like a green sea, with yurts floating on it like sailboats. Girls and boys dressed gaily in national costumes, flocks of sheep, galloping horses, colorful wild flowers and chirruping birds create an intoxicating landscape.

If you attend a traditional wedding, you will be charmed by its interesting customs.

Inspite of its aridity, Xinjiang produces better rice than the wet country in the south. Xinjiang fruits overflow the market year round. The tantalizing fragrances of the pearl-like grapes, the honeyed Hami melons, the scented Korla pears, Kuqa apricots, Kashi figs and cherries, and Yecheng pomegranate fill the air.

Xinjiang encompasses one-sixth of China's territory. It is especially rich in underground resources, with petroleum and coal reserves leading the country. Xinjiang claims more than a hundred types of rare metals. It deserves the title 'land of treasure.'

Some of these treasures are being exploited, but most still await excavation. Led by the Party and the people's government, the people of various nationalities are working jointly to build a modern socialist Xinjiang.



Remains of the Silk Road

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