

Xinjiang Seen Through Foreign Eyes

Dialogue

By Staff Reporters

Seventy years ago, the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region was established, a milestone on China's path to unity, development and shared prosperity. Today, its story is being told not only by the people living in this region, but also by those from afar who have visited and worked here, and felt the pulse of its culture and development.

Their thoughts on the region are not influenced by Western media. They come from vivid lived experiences. These are the reflections of four foreign experts whose lives have intersected with Xinjiang. Their stories, though different in focus, converge on a single truth: Xinjiang is a place where cultures meet, where tradition and progress walk hand in hand, and where human kindness bridges every difference.

Feeling part of a whole

Last year, in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang, Italian scientist Francesco Faiola once wore a traditional Uygur embroidered hat after a colleague's playful suggestion. As he walked down the street, a tourist approached and asked him for directions in Mandarin clearly believing he was a local. "We joked that maybe I just had the right look," Faiola said. But beneath the humor was something deeper. "That hat was more than just clothing," he reflected. "It became a small but meaningful connection. It helped me feel welcomed and part of something."

For Faiola, that moment captured the spirit of Xinjiang: not a place of enforced assimilation, but of open and inclusive coexistence. "Sometimes, all it takes is a friendly gesture to bring people together. And that's what multicultural coexistence in Xinjiang is about and different groups live side by side and share their lives with openness



A tourist from Pakistan (2nd from the right in the front row), dances with a local resident at the homestay in Kashi, Xinjiang on September 10. (PHOTO: XINHUA)

and warmth."

This warmth echoed in the words of Spanish language expert Francisco Javier Ayllón Piquero, who has lived in China since 2001. "From the grasslands in the north to the mountains and rivers in the south, it's the warmth and kindness of the Chinese people I've met that have made the biggest impact on me," he said.

Australian sinologist Colin Mackerras has not set foot in China for five years, yet his memories remain vivid. "I encountered landscapes and experiences vastly different from the Western media reports," he said. "My first-hand observations inspired many books on Chinese ethnic minorities."

Common prosperity in action

When Ayllón visited Kashi, he was struck by something unexpected. "I saw many successful commercial and industrial projects from Guangdong," he said, a province thousands of kilometers away. This was his first real encounter with the Chinese concept of "pairing assistance," a national initiative since 1997 that channels financial, technical and human resources from more developed regions to support Xinjiang's growth.

"This experience helps deepen my

understanding of the phrase 'Chinese modernization is the modernization of common prosperity for all,'" Ayllón said. For him, this was not abstract policy, but lived reality: a system designed not to leave anyone behind.

Faiola also observed this balanced progress. "The transportation system is highly developed—highways, railways and air travel form an efficient network," he said. "Housing projects combine traditional design with modern comforts. Healthcare has seen major advances, with telemedicine improving local clinics. In education, bilingual teaching and vocational training are giving young people more opportunities than ever." He noted that public services operate in multiple languages. "It was clear that people from various backgrounds are interacting more and growing closer in their everyday lives."

Preserving culture with innovation

At the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Museum, Faiola stood before a digital exhibit reconstructing ancient cave temples in 3D. "They're using technology to protect cultural heritage," he said. "This helps avoid damaging the actual sites through over-tourism, while letting more people experience

the culture immersively."

Equally important is education. "Schools teach in both Mandarin and ethnic minority languages," Faiola said. "Students learn about diverse cultural histories through specially developed textbooks. This helps young people take part in modern society while still holding on to their own cultural identity. It's not about choosing one over the other," he said. "It's a thoughtful, balanced effort that benefits both."

Meanwhile, Mackerras emphasized a similar point. Despite their relatively small share of the population, China's ethnic groups are central to its identity. "As a Western scholar, I believe China's policies towards ethnic minorities hold valuable references for other countries."

Science sees no borders

The story of cooperation in Xinjiang is not only written in classrooms and cultural centers but also in laboratories. In Belgium, Professor Philippe De Maeyer still speaks with pride about the Sino-Belgian Joint Lab for Geo-Information, established in 2016 with the Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography (XIEG). His partnership with XIEG began in 2005, and for over a decade, he traveled annually to Xinjiang to teach and collaborate.

"Mutual understanding between people from cooperative parties plays a vital role in advancing collaborative progress. More than just research, the lab has become a bridge for young scientists. 'Students were able to secure adequate funds to complete their education,'" he said. Under the mentorship of both Chinese and Belgian professors, they've published an increasing number of papers in high-impact international journals. "Researchers can acquire new working methods from different organizations," De Maeyer said.

"Today, the unbelievable speed of knowledge evolution requires constant exchanges and cooperation," he said. "We always need to communicate, to share, and to learn from one another."

Tech+Culture

Pieces of History, Evidence of Exchanges

By Staff Reporters

The ruins of the Mo'er Temple in Kashi city in Xinjiang stand witness to nearly 900 years of Buddhist history. Once part of the ancient Shule city when Xinjiang was known as the Western Regions, this earthen temple complex thrived from the first to the early 10th century, making it the oldest and westernmost well-preserved large-scale Buddhist site of its kind ever discovered in China.

Since 2019, a joint team from Minzu University of China and the Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology has been excavating at the site. What began as a cautious test dig around the temple's two iconic towers quickly turned into one of the most significant archaeological breakthroughs in recent years.

Within just two weeks, fragments of plaster Buddhist statues began emerging from the soil. Over time, the team uncovered a dense complex of 18 structures with 62 rooms, including pagoda foundations, corridor-style halls, lecture rooms, kitchens and rectangular prayer halls.

More than 30,000 artifacts were recovered, such as copper coins and silk textiles, offering rare insights into the spiritual and daily lives of the monks who once lived here.

"We've unearthed over 10,000 fragments of Buddhist statues," said Professor Xiao Xiaoyong of Minzu University of China, who is leading the excavation. "These statues vary greatly in size, from life-sized figures to small figurines just centimeters tall, and reflect the evolution of Buddhism as it traveled from South Asia into China and gradually took on local characteristics."

The facial features, expressions, hairstyles and clothing details of the statues reveal a process of cultural integration, adaptation and innovation. They tell a story of harmonious blending, evidence of how Buddhism became sinicized over centuries.

One small discovery has major historical implications: a piece of mud tile commonly used in high-status buildings during China's Tang Dynasty (618 - 907).

Historical records mention the construction of a grand temple called the

Dayun Temple in Shule during the reign of Empress Wu Zetian. "This tile suggests the Mo'er Temple could have been a state-sponsored religious site," Xiao said. "It reflects not only religious diversity in Xinjiang but also the central government's active role in managing religious affairs and maintaining cultural order in the region."

Modern scientific methods have deepened understanding of the site. Radiocarbon dating confirms that the earliest structures date back to the first century, evidence that Buddhism reached this part of China far earlier than previously documented. Interdisciplinary studies, including pollen analysis, residue testing, and micro-archaeological techniques, have reconstructed the ancient environment and monastic life.

For example, pollen data show a shift from a wetter climate during the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-220 A.D.) to increasing aridity after the Tang, while food residues reveal what the monks ate, providing a vivid picture of their daily routines.

The temple is just one chapter in the broader narrative revealed by decades of archaeological work in Xinjiang. Recent discoveries across the region continue to reshape our understanding of China's deep historical roots and cultural interconnectedness.

At the Tongtian Cave site in Altay in northern Xinjiang, archaeologists found evidence of human activity dating back 40,000 to 50,000 years.

They uncovered wheat from West Asia and millet from northern China, both over 5,000 years old. "This suggests an ancient 'grassland corridor' of exchange between East and West long before the Silk Road," said Yu Jianjun, the project's lead researcher.

"Xinjiang's archaeological finds clearly show that the region has been an inseparable part of Chinese territory since ancient times," said Li Wenyi, director of the Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. "It has always been home to multiple ethnic groups, cultures, and religions living side by side. These discoveries enrich our understanding of a unified, multi-ethnic Chinese civilization and strengthen the shared spiritual foundation of the Chinese nation."

Promising Land: Smarter, Greener and More Vibrant

By ZHANG Jiabin & LIN Yuchen

Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, lying in the foothills of the Tianshan Mountains in north China, is charting a path of modernization that reflects China's vision for high-quality development.

At the heart of this transformation is the upgrading of traditional industries through intelligent manufacturing. Xinjiang Bayi Iron and Steel, which in 1952 ended the region's "no steel, no iron" history, has evolved into Xinjiang's largest steel enterprise. Where once workers relied on eyesight and experience, today intelligent control systems manage production remotely, while modern blast furnaces cut carbon emissions dramatically.

The hydrogen-rich, carbon-circulating oxygen blast furnace reduces emissions by nearly 600,000 tonnes annually, a breakthrough equivalent to planting a forest of 700 square kilometers. Even wastewater is repurposed. Black swans glide across lakes fed by the recycled water, turning industrial byproduct into ecological gain.

This rebirth of an old industry exemplifies how digitalization and green technology are driving Xinjiang's smart manufacturing.

Equally transformative is Xinjiang's role as a national energy hub. The country's largest integrated solar thermal and photovoltaic demonstration project is under construction in Hami in eastern Xinjiang. Cutting-edge linear Fresnel technology is being used to harness the

brilliant desert sunlight. Around 260,000 mirrors covering more than 800,000 square meters will focus the sunlight onto a receiver to generate 148 million kilowatt-hours of clean solar power annually.

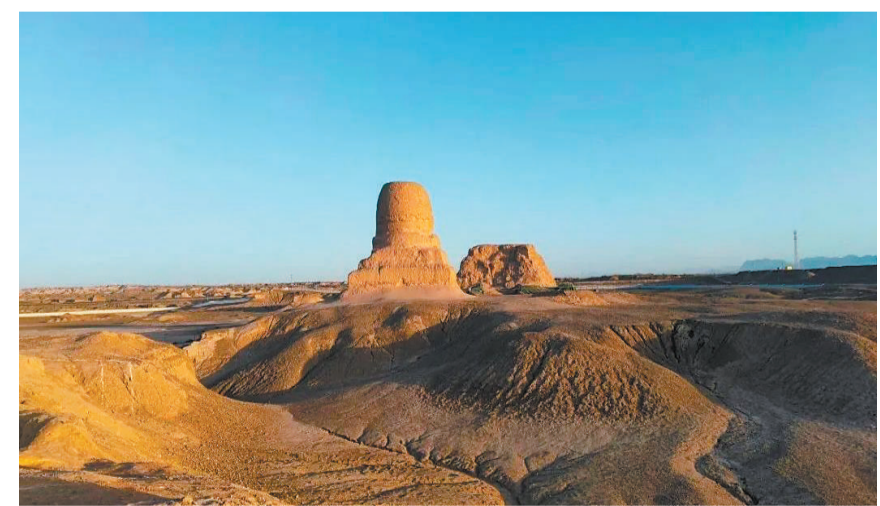
The Hami-Zhengzhou ultra-high-voltage direct current project—spanning over 2,000 kilometers—has become a "green artery" of power transmission, sending electricity, much of it renewable, across six provinces. In 2024 alone, the project transmitted 45.4 billion kilowatt-hours, over 40 percent of it from wind and solar, lighting homes and industries beyond Xinjiang's borders.

The story of Xinjiang's renewal is not limited to factories and power stations. Historical villages such as Tuyugou at the foot of the Flaming Moun-

tains are being revitalized through cultural tourism. Their restored courtyards and expanded scenic areas draw thousands of visitors. In Turpan, villagers use livestreaming and e-commerce to sell grapes and dry fruit nationwide, blending tradition with modern entrepreneurship.

Rural industries, cultural preservation, and community prosperity are advancing hand in hand, creating new opportunities for inclusive development.

As China's gateway to the West, this vast region is writing a new chapter where tradition and modernity converge, where ecological stewardship and technological progress reinforce each other, and where ethnic diversity and shared prosperity have become pillars of national rejuvenation.



A distant view of the Mo'er Temple site in Kashi city, Xinjiang. (PHOTO: XINHUA)

Xinjiang: Seventy Years of Development

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Energy infrastructure has also seen rapid development. On June 10, 2025, the Hami-Chongqing ±800 kV ultra-high voltage direct current transmission project began operation, delivering Xinjiang's electricity to central China within 0.007 second. With five major power transmission corridors, Xinjiang currently transmits over 100 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity annually to 22 provinces and autonomous regions, powered by a diversified mix of coal, hydro, wind and solar energy.

People-centered development

For the millions of Xinjiang residents, progress is measured not only in

statistics but in safety, comfort and opportunity.

On January 23, 2024, a 7.1-magnitude earthquake struck Wushi county in Xinjiang's Aksu prefecture. Raheman Abudureyimu, living near the epicenter, said that "the quake hit in the early morning, but our house didn't collapse. Everyone in my family was safe." This resilience is no accident. Since 2004, Xinjiang has been the first region in the country to build earthquake-resistant houses in rural areas, designed to withstand geological disasters and improve

the living standards of the local people. By the end of 2024, 2.73 million rural households had benefited from the program. Social spending reflects the region's priorities: More than 70 percent of Xinjiang's fiscal spending has been allocated to improving people's livelihoods over the past decade.

In 2024, more than 99 percent of youngsters in Xinjiang were enrolled in the nine-year compulsory education system, above the national average. In southern Xinjiang, including Aksu, Kashi and Hotan, children enjoy 15

years of free education, from preschool to high school. By 2024, the region had 63 institutions of higher learning, 24 more than in 2012. The development of the health sector has improved people's health, with the average life expectancy in the region increasing from 30 years in 1949 to 77 years in 2024.

Gateway to Eurasia

At the Urumqi International Land Port Area in the regional capital, cranes swing over rows of freight containers, loading or unloading cargo. The China-Europe freight trains depart daily, more

efficient than before. Xinjiang is leveraging the advantage of its geographical position at the heart of Eurasia. A multi-modal network of railways, highways, air routes and logistics hubs is rapidly taking shape, linking China with Central Asia, Europe and beyond.

A new terminal at the Urumqi Tianshan International Airport has elevated the city's status as an aviation hub. Xinjiang now has 595 civil air routes, of which 25 are international, connecting to 17 countries and regions.

The establishment of the China

(Xinjiang) Pilot Free Trade Zone has accelerated trade. In 2024, the region's import and export value surged to 435.11 billion RMB (about 60.68 billion USD), marking a 21.8 percent year-on-year increase and underscoring its remarkable resilience and vitality.

At the Horgos Port, Kazakh businessman Nurbaik applauded the dramatic improvements: "Now I use a smartphone app to file customs declarations. It takes just three hours, eight times faster than a decade ago." Innovations like "railway express" clearance, "direct loading upon arrival," and smart port systems have streamlined logistics and boosted cross-border trade.

