

IN FOCUS: OUT OF MANY, ONE P.14

FEATURES: XINJIANG FLAVORS ON SHOW P.46

# XINJIANG 当代新疆 TODAY

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## WILDERNESS REBORN

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# Seeds of Unity

By Yan Wei

In the Pomegranate Seed Plaza in Nileke (Nilke) County, Yili (Ili) Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, a scene of everyday harmony unfolds. The image of pomegranate seeds clustered together is a familiar metaphor for solidarity among China's many ethnic groups. True to its name, the plaza offers a welcoming space where residents of diverse ethnic backgrounds connect, build friendships and enjoy communal life.

This vision of mutual "embeddedness," where different ethnic groups live, learn, work and have fun together, is at the heart of China's approach to strengthening social cohesion. In places like Nileke, this concept is given concrete form through policies designed to promote broader interaction, exchange and integration.

Xinjiang, a region of remarkable diversity that accounts for one sixth of China's land area, is a canvas for these efforts. According to the latest national census in 2020, the region's population exceeds 25.8 million. Of these, 11.6 million are Uygur, while the Han population stands at 10.9 million, alongside Kazak, Hui and multiple other ethnic groups. On a national scale, the Han account for some 91 percent of China's population. This demographic landscape highlights the importance of policies designed to promote understanding and shared development.

A key step in this direction is the Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law, adopted in March and set to take effect on July 1. The law requires governments at and above the county level to coordinate economic and social development planning and resource allocation to facilitate the construction of embedded communities. Its aim is to create environments in which people of diverse ethnic backgrounds can share resources, work collaboratively and live together harmoniously.

The approach goes beyond physical proximity to active participation. The law mandates governments at all levels encourage residents from all ethnic groups to engage in community governance. One example is the Pomegranate Seed Service Stations established across Xinjiang. These centers offer a spectrum of services, from employment assistance to

the hosting of consultations on local affairs and dispute mediation, helping strengthen cross-cultural understanding and social ties. Integrating with broader urban development efforts, such initiatives aim to enhance the spatial, cultural, economic, social and psychological interconnectedness of communities across Xinjiang and beyond.

Language also plays a crucial role. The promotion of *putonghua* and standard Chinese characters, the commonly used spoken and written forms across the country, is seen as a key tool for facilitating communication. As standard Chinese is not yet widely adopted in all areas, the law supports its nationwide popularization, ensuring that it is taught and used at schools. This linguistic bridge is vital, offering opportunities for ethnic minority language speakers to broaden their horizons, pursue wider employment prospects and integrate more effectively into broader society, while emphasizing the protection of ethnic minority languages.

This framework, often described as "unity in diversity," seeks a balance. It affirms the equality of all ethnic groups while encouraging shared participation in a broader national community. Core principles include reinforcing a shared identity as members of the Chinese nation, respecting differences and embracing diversity, raising awareness that ethnic identities are not fixed but are socially and historically constructed, combating negative stereotypes, and promoting harmonious coexistence.

The growing emphasis on interaction and exchange aligns with the international shift toward civic integration. This is a lesson learned by many multicultural societies after grappling with the potential drawbacks of not addressing issues such as social fragmentation.

From vibrant public plazas like the Pomegranate Seed Plaza in Nileke to initiatives promoting shared language and participation, Xinjiang is working to strengthen connections among its diverse communities. These efforts aim to cultivate mutual understanding and shared purpose, helping weave a stronger, more inclusive social fabric across this vast and diverse region. **XT**

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*Xinjiang:  
Beyond Imagination*

# CONTENTS



## IN FOCUS

---

# 14

### FORGING A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Building national identity through governance and development

# 18

### ONE LANE, ONE FAMILY

Friendship and harmony along a 640-meter street

## EDITORIAL

---

# 01

Seeds of Unity

## SNAPSHOTS

---

# 06

The Alpine Beauty of Jiangbulake

## FACTS & FIGURES

---

# 12

Ethnic Groups and Religions

## OPINION

# 24

### Living Archive of Global Exchange

Xinjiang as a historic crossroads

# 28

### A Strong Signal

Q1 data highlight shifting economic gears

# 32

### Tacheng's Time

Frontier prefecture's rise as an economic and opening-up hub

# 36

### Beyond the Border

New model of China-Central Asia exchange in Huoerguosi

Cover Photo: The World Mystery Town, a popular attraction known for its yardang landform, in Karamay City (JIN XIN)

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# 40

### Ancient Journeys Bridging Civilizations

Faxian and Xuanzang's records of the Western Regions

## FEATURES

# 46

### The Crunch That Travels

Xinjiang brands shine at the 2026 China International Consumer Products Expo

# 50

### Planting Ahead

Technology boosts agricultural efficiency and output

# 54

### Bridging Better Lives

Jiangsu's pairing assistance promotes prosperity

# 58

### My Kashi Kinship

A cross-ethnic bond forged through poverty alleviation

# 62

### Lighting the Way With Words

Timely encouragement rekindles a writer's dream

## THROUGH THEIR EYES

# 66

### Experiencing Xinjiang Through Food, Festivals And Friendship

A Kyrgyz student's journey into Xinjiang's diverse traditions

## CLOSE-UP

# 70

### Beyond Black Oil

How Karamay transforms itself into a digital oasis

# 76

### Wilderness Odyssey


An oil city's new adventure tourism landscape

## DISCOVER

# 80

### A Symphony of Nature and Industry

A guide to Karamay's stunning desert and oil heritage



Pine forests stretch toward the horizon along the Jiangbulake Grand Canyon, which has an average altitude of 1,900 meters and stretches for 15 km, on August 30, 2025 (WANG YA/JUAN)

**I**n Qitai County of Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture lies the Jiangbulake Scenic Area, an earthly paradise whose name means the Source of Sacred Water in Kazak. Jiangbulake features abundant natural wonders and a distinct oasis culture. Covering 48 square km, the scenic area spans diverse landforms such as snow-capped mountains, glaciers, meadows, forests and wheat fields. It harmoniously blends mountain dry farming, nomadic traditions and Silk Road heritage.

Today, activities hosted at the scenic area include sightseeing, science education and cultural experiences. Guided by the principle of protective development, the area has seen continuous improvements in its infrastructure and a steady expansion in the variety of tourism-related activities.

*(Text by Wang Yajuan)*



SNAPSHOTS

# THE ALPINE BEAUTY OF JIANGBULAKE

# SNAPSHOTS



遇见江南水乡



Tourists explore the Jiangbulake Scenic Area on June 23, 2025 (CNSPHOTO)

# SNAPSHOTS





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3	

1. The Jiangbulake Scenic Area includes 4,000 hectares of dryland wheat fields, which rise and fall with the mountain terrain to create some of China's most idyllic rural scenery (WANG YAJUAN)

2. Sheep graze in a section of the scenic area located at the foot of the Tianshan Mountains (WANG YAJUAN)

3. Tourists follow a path through an alpine meadow in the scenic area (WANG YAJUAN)

# FACTS & FIGURES

## Ethnic Groups and Religions

### Uygur, Han, Kazak and Hui

These ethnic groups each have a population of more than 1 million in Xinjiang

### Kirgiz and Mongolian

These ethnic groups each have a population of 100,000-1 million in Xinjiang

13

The number of ethnic groups that had settled in Xinjiang by the end of the 19th century: Uygur, Han, Kazak, Mongolian, Hui, Kirgiz, Manchu, Xibe, Tajik, Daur, Uzbek, Tatar and Russian



## What does Uygur mean?

In 1934, Xinjiang, then a province of China, issued a government order, stipulating that “Weiwuer” would be the standard name for the Uygur people in Chinese. It was interpreted as conveying the meaning of maintaining unity among the people.

## Are Uygurs a Turkic people?

No. The main ancestors of the Uygurs were the Ouigour people who lived on the Mongolian Plateau during the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties. The Ouigours were at times under the rule of the Turkic powers. While the Uygur language belongs to the Turkic family, the historical origins of the Uygur people are complex and distinct.

## Is Islam the sole belief system of the Uygurs?

No. Before the introduction of Islam, the ancestors of the Uygurs practiced a variety of belief systems, including primitive religion and shamanism, followed by Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Manichaeism and Nestorianism. Today, while many Uygurs are Muslim, some follow other religions, and some do not adhere to any religion.

*(Compiled by Xinjiang Today)*



(Left) The Shaanxi Mosque in Urumqi, first built during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), is characterized by beam-column construction common in other parts of China. This embodies a form of localization of Islam (VCG)

A performance in Tacheng City, Tacheng Prefecture, in May 2019 marking the 225th anniversary of Xibe people's westward migration. In 1764, the Qing court relocated more than 4,000 members of the Xibe ethnic group from northeast China to the northwest to guard border areas in Xinjiang (VCG)

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## IN FOCUS

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# FORGING A STRONG SENSE OF COMMUNITY

*By Tuersun Aibai*

T

The Chinese nation's sense of community is rooted in China's realities. It reflects both the individual awareness of belonging to the Chinese nation and the deep identification across political, economic, cultural and social dimensions.

In 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping first proposed forging a sense of community for the Chinese nation. This concept has moved from theory to governing principle. China's Ethnic Unity and Progress Promotion Law

was adopted on March 12 this year.

The concept now shapes policy across ethnic regions, where the challenge is not only economic development but also the cultivation of emotional and civic integration. One of the evident cases is Xinjiang.

Situated along the ancient Silk Road connecting Asia and Europe, Xinjiang is both a geographic frontier and a strategic fulcrum. As a core region of the Belt and Road Initiative [which aims to boost connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes—*Ed.*], it has been widening its doors, becoming a key corridor in China's westward opening up. At the same time, it remains a region of significant ethnic diversity, where questions of identity, development and stability intersect.

To speak of Xinjiang today is to speak of transformation—not only economic, but



A view of Xinjiang Museum in Urumqi (VCG)



Ophthalmology doctors examine a young patient at a hospital in Yingshaji County of Kashi (Kashgar) Prefecture on September 15, 2023 (XINHUA)

institutional and social. The region is in the midst of an effort to integrate the concept of a shared national community into every aspect of governance. This is not a single policy but a layered approach, combining legal frameworks, cultural initiatives, economic development and social integration.

## Forging bonds

In recent years, the regional government has launched a dense framework of policies, regulations and administrative bodies to coordinate efforts around ethnic unity.

To date, Xinjiang has established 101 national demonstration bases for ethnic unity and progress in 14 prefectures and cities, while 108 counties and districts have set up offices for related work.

Local authorities have also invested heavily in public cultural infrastructure, from libraries to museums, while promoting artistic productions with Xinjiang's multi-ethnic character.

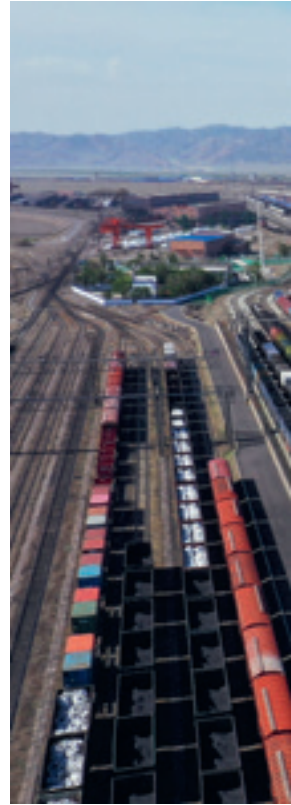
Efforts to build a "shared spiritual home" have translated into significant investment in cultural infrastructure: libraries, museums, cultural centers and community spaces. Today, Xinjiang has 111 public libraries, 118 cultural centers, 1,130

township-level cultural stations, as well as 150 museums (memorial halls). Awards have been instituted to encourage literary and artistic creation and a series of Xinjiang-themed film and television works aired to showcase the diversity and magnificent scenery in Xinjiang. They include the TV drama *To the Wonder*, the story of a young Han girl's self-discovery after she returns to her mother's small, remote grocery store in the mountains. Education plays a central role, particularly efforts to expand the use of standard Chinese as the common national language and improve understanding of the Chinese culture. The regional government has launched exchange programs for students in Xinjiang with schools in other regions across China.

Fourteen universities and 20 primary and secondary schools have been set as demonstration bases to strengthen the awareness of the Chinese national community.

## Improving wellbeing

In recent years, Xinjiang, with its abundant resources, geographical advantages and industrial foundation, has built a distinctive modern industrial system, ensuring stable employment and income growth of people of all ethnic groups through ▶



Performers from Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region perform a musical drama on the ancient Silk Road in Beijing on February 28 (XINHUA)

multiple channels.

Over the past decade, Xinjiang's growth has outpaced the national average, accompanied by large-scale investments in housing, healthcare and environmental improvement.

In 2025, the region's GDP was around 2.146 trillion yuan (\$310.8 billion), outpacing the national average level for three consecutive years. The per-capita disposable income of urban and rural residents reached 45,106 yuan (\$6,533) and 20,793 yuan (\$3,011), respectively.

The number of newly employed people in urban areas exceeded 488,000, and the total number of people covered by basic medical insurance was over 20 million. From 2011 to 2025, over 11 million farmers and herdsmen have moved into new homes.

Xinjiang is promoting a new type of urbanization centered on people, especially in its south. It aims to develop industries to retain people with high skills, ensure equal public services, and promote all-round development of all ethnic groups.

A large number of labor-intensive industries such as deep processing of agricultural and sideline products, textile and clothing manufacturing, and electronic product assembly have settled

in southern Xinjiang, pooling labor, capital and technology in urban areas and accelerating urbanization.

The regional government has also been partnering with 29 other provinces or municipalities for labor mobility, and improving community-level engagement to create environments where people of different backgrounds live, work and socialize together.

As of 2025, Xinjiang had over 1 million public rental housing units, and 119,800 units of various affordable housing. Over 6,000 old urban communities were renovated to benefit over 1 million households.

Legal frameworks are ensuring equal rights for residents while reinforcing the norms of civic identity. Public legal education campaigns seek to embed these principles more deeply within society.

Since 2021, Xinjiang has carried out over 600,000 legal education activities in rural areas, benefiting more than 7 million people. Legislation to protect cultural heritage—including intangible traditions—underscores an attempt to balance unity with preservation. The message is that national cohesion need not



China-Europe (Central Asia) freight trains at the Alashankou Port, also known as the Alataw Pass, a primary land port in the Bortala Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, on May 25, 2024 (XINHUA)

come at the expense of cultural diversity.

In the past, Xinjiang experienced periods of significant unrest, including violent incidents attributed to extremist groups. From 1990 to 2016, thousands of such cases were recorded. The absence of similar incidents in the last decade can be attributed in part to these policies.

Today, Xinjiang is engaged in China's national development strategy, has anchored its strategic positioning, and is leveraging the opportunities brought by the Belt and Road Initiative. It attaches greater significance to economic and social development, while ensuring stability, improving people's wellbeing, and following a people-centered approach to promote high-quality economic growth.

In this way, Xinjiang has sought to articulate its own version of modernization, at the core of which is building a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation. It treats cohesion not as a byproduct of development, but as its organizing principle.

Human civilization is neither linear nor uniform. Each society, shaped by its own history and constraints, experiments with different models in pursuit of a common aim: a more stable,

prosperous and dignified life for its people. And within China, Xinjiang offers a particularly concentrated example of this process.

In recent years, the region has advanced a set of policies to strengthen a shared sense of community, while simultaneously pursuing economic growth and social stability. The result is a trajectory marked by increasing cohesion, sustained development and a measure of social calm that contrasts with the earlier periods of unrest. Its ongoing transformation is not simply a regional story, but part of a larger global inquiry into how nations navigate differences in an age of rapid change.

If there is a lesson to be drawn, it is perhaps a modest one: Modernization is not a single road, but many. And each path, however distinct, reflects a shared human aspiration—to build a society in which more people can see themselves, and their futures, within it. **XT**

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## IN FOCUS

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# ONE LANE, ONE FAMILY

How a 640-meter street in Xinjiang weaves together different ethnic groups through decades of neighborly love *By Lu Yan*



Yuliu Lane in Tasierhai Village is a street just 640 meters long. The lane takes its name from a century-old tree where an elm (*yu*) and a willow (*liu*) have grown into one. As seen on the street, sturdy willow shoots straight toward the sky, while an elm twines tightly around it, their branches and leaves intertwined beyond distinction.

“The life in our lane is just like this tree—closely connected,” said Xu Li, Curator of the Yuliu Lane Memory Hall.

Tasierhai is located in Emin County, Tacheng Prefecture. The lane is home to 32 families from nine ethnic groups, including Han, Uygur, Kazak, Hui and Russian. These villagers live side by side, sharing meals, celebrating festivals together, and treating each other as family, intertwined like the branches of the ancient tree, close and inseparable.

### Decades of neighborly bonds

“I’ve known my older brother for decades; our bond spans four generations,” Lin Zhongdong, a villager in Yuliu, told *Xinjiang Today*. As he recalled his connection with his “older Uygur brother,” 72-year-old Kuerluxi Wusiman, his eyes grow soft.

“In the fall of 1964, my family had just moved here. We knew no one and didn’t speak the language of other ethnic groups,” the 65-year-old Han recalled.

The first to lend a helping hand was Kuerluxi’s father, Wusiman Akenbai. “He didn’t speak standard Chinese, so he used gestures to communicate with us, helping us move our things. He also brought us freshly baked naan and told us to come to him if we needed anything.”

“At first we couldn’t understand each other well, but as time went by, we grew close. Kuerluxi taught me Uygur, and I taught him Chinese language characters. Before we knew it, we were close friends,” Lin said.

In 1991, when Lin’s family ran into financial trouble, Kuerluxi did not hesitate to help. He suggested they go into business together, raising livestock and making dried meat to sell.

“Whenever we face difficulties, we always support each other. Once, when our sheep got sick, Kuerluxi rode a horse through the night to fetch a vet. He came back soaked with sweat,” Lin said. “All these years, I’ve been in charge of raising money to buy livestock and handling sales, while Kuerluxi takes care of fattening the animals and smoking the meat. We’re like real brothers—sharing the good times and the bad. We’ve worked together for over 30 years, and we’ve never once argued or fallen out over money.”

Their families support each other in daily life as well. When Lin’s wife was hospitalized after a car accident and their daugh-



A local dancer greets tourists at Yuliu Lane in Emin County, Tacheng Prefecture, on May 30, 2024 (XINHUA)

ter was just 3 years old, Kuerluxi's wife quietly stepped in to cook, do laundry and look after the child.

Another time, when Kuerluxi's son was badly injured in a fall, he considered selling his cattle to cover medical expenses. Lin immediately sent enough money to cover the hospital bills.

"My daughter and his daughter grew up together. My granddaughter and his grandchildren are childhood friends too. Our two families just can't do without each other," Kuerluxi said.

## Strangers no more

A few hundred meters from Lin's and

*"We've worked together for over 30 years, and we've never once argued or fallen out over money."*

—Lin Zhongdong, a villager in Yuliu

Kuerluxi's homes lives fellow villager Ma Xinhua, a retired police officer. In Emin, her name is known to just about everyone.

Entering her home, the first thing you notice is a family portrait hanging prominently on the wall. The image radiates warmth and joy. Family members come from different backgrounds—Ma is Hui, her husband is Uygur, her daughter-in-law is Kazak. There are also "family members" Ma "found on the streets": her Han "father" Yang Jichun, her Kazak "brother" Yeermulate Kezihan and her Kazak "son" Wulaziebieke.

"Father Yang" was the first person Ma brought home. One night in early winter of 2004, she found him huddled by the roadside. ▶



Lin Zhongdong (left) and Kuerluxi Wusiman (second left) chat with fellow villagers (COURTESY PHOTO)

thinly dressed in shoes without socks, shivering in the bitter cold.

Ma took him home and made him a warm bowl of hand-pulled noodle soup. As they talked, she learned that his wife had passed away and he had no children. Watching him warm himself by the coal stove while devouring his meal hungrily, tears came to her eyes.

“This old man needs a warm home, a place to sleep and have regular meals,” she recalled.

After discussing it with her husband, she decided to take him in as her “Han Chinese father.” She has cared for him ever since.

Over the past two decades, Yang gradually became part of the family, and gave Ma a feeling of having a true father. Sometimes, when Ma worked late, he would wait by the roadside. Only when she safely returned would he finally go to bed.

In 2009, Ma brought home two more strangers. This time, a Kazak couple.

She came across a pregnant woman struggling to carry a heavy sack of sunflower seeds. After inquiring, Ma learned that the woman’s husband was ill and couldn’t work, so she had to labor on her own, and they could hardly afford rent.

Ma pointed to a house not far away and said, “That’s our home. It’ll keep you out of the wind and rain just fine. I won’t charge you any rent. Come and stay.”

From then on, the couple lived and ate together with Ma’s family. A few months later, their child was born there, and the health of Yeermulate Kezihan, the husband, gradually recovered as well.

To help the family become self-reliant, Ma taught them how to bake naan, get a driver’s license, learn basic life skills, study standard Chinese and find decent jobs. Now, they have bought



A century-old tree where an elm and a willow have grown into one in Yuliu Lane in Tacheng Prefecture (COURTESY PHOTO)



A family photo of Ma Xinhua (second left, front) (COURTESY PHOTO)

their own home in town, and their life is better than ever.

Wulazibieke Madate, Ma's "Kazak son," lost his mother as a young child, and at the age of 12, his father died in a car accident. Left with no support, he considered dropping out of school.

In 2012, a distant relative of Wulazibieke came to Ma for help, who said she often grazed livestock in uninhabited areas and was unable to address the child's schooling and daily care needs. Looking at the child in front of her—thin and dark-skinned, with hands covered in frostbite—Ma decided to help. She quickly arranged for the child to enroll in a school and applied for financial aid. Ma didn't stop there. She also took Wulazibieke into her own home. Under her care, the child gradually opened up and thrived both academically and emotionally, becoming a true member of the family.

Since retiring, Ma has transformed her living room into a community gathering space. Every week, a meeting is held here, where residents of different ethnic groups gather to share stories, exchange ideas and resolve problems. Moreover, it has also become a place where neighbors bring their disputes and settle them with understanding.

The space serves as a "classroom" as well, where residents learn about the Civil Code, first aid skills and even basic psychology. During festivals, it transforms into a dance hall, where people of all ethnicities gather, sing, and dance together in joy.

"Seeing everyone sitting together like one family makes me truly happy," Ma said with a smile. "Ethnic unity starts with the small things around us—making sure everyone feels the warmth of home. It's all about love." **XT**

# Celebrating the Launch of *Xinjiang Today*: Voices From Across China and Beyond



**Omarjan Kurban**, a deputy to the National People's Congress (NPC) and a senior management professional at the Energy Research Institute of Xinjiang Energy Group



**Gulimila Dawulieti**, an NPC deputy and a national role model for ethnic unity and progress

“Congratulations on the official launch of *Xinjiang Today*.”

“*Xinjiang Today* helps the world understand Xinjiang.”



**Liu Liangcheng**, Chairman of the Xinjiang Federation of Literary and Art Circles and Chairman of the Xinjiang Writers Association

“Xinjiang was once a place where four great ancient civilizations met and blended. Today, it is a vast home shared by people of many ethnic groups. Congratulations on the launch and publication of *Xinjiang Today*. May it present more real, vivid and lively stories of Xinjiang to the world.”



**Rafael Henrique Zerbetto**, a Brazilian Esperanto expert at the China International Communications Group Center for the Asia-Pacific and a recipient of the Chinese Government Friendship Award

“I wish *Xinjiang Today* all the best. Looking forward to reading more of *Xinjiang Today*’s stories.”



**Mahnoor Makhdoom**, an international affairs editor at *The Daily Mail*, Pakistan

“Congratulations to the team behind *Xinjiang Today*. Publications like this play an important role in helping audiences better understand the richness and diversity of Xinjiang from its culture and history to the everyday lives of its people in this increasingly complex global media environment. Platforms like this that aim to tell local stories and share lived experiences are more important than ever before.

*Xinjiang Today* offers a valuable window into the region that is often discussed but not always directly heard from. By highlighting voices on the ground, it contributes to greater cultural understanding and dialogue.

I wish the publication success as it grows, reaches new audiences and continues to build bridges through storytelling.”