

IN FOCUS: EXPLORING TRADITION AND INNOVATION P.14

OPINION: NEW BOOKS REVISIT HISTORY P.30

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THE SUNSHINE ECONOMY

How Tulufan is turning hot weather
into an economic driver

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地址：北京市西城区百万庄大街24号 邮编：100037
编委会：辛峰 贺鹏 刘云云 高丁博 于淑均 曾文卉
主任：辛峰
总编室电话：(010) 68996252 发行部电话：(010) 68310644

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President: Xin Feng

Associate Editor in Chief: Liu Yunnyun

Vice Presidents: He Peng, Gao Dingbo, Yu Shujun

Program Supervisor: Zeng Wenhui

Executive Editor: Yan Wei

Associate Executive Editor: Wang Yajuan

Production Director: Yao Bin

Editors: Wang Hairong, Zhang Shasha, Lu Yan

Researcher: Lan Xinzhen

Editorial Consultants: Elizabeth Smith, Alex Ryan

Reporters: Ji Jing, Kang Caiqi, Li Qing, Li Wenhan,

Li Xiaoyang, Liang Xiao, Ma Miaomiao, Pan Xiaoqiao, Peng Jiawei,

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Zhang Yage

Photographer: Wei Yao

Art: Li Shigong

Design Director: Wang Yajuan

Chief Designer: Cui Xiaodong

Designer: Wang Boyan

Editorial Administrator: Zeng Wenhui

Editorial Assistant: Shang Zhouhao

Planning Director: Xu Bei

Deputy Planning Director: Li Nan

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Administration: Zhang Yajie

Legal Counsel: Yue Cheng

North America Bureau (New York City)

Chief: Yu Shujun

Tel/Fax: 1-201-792-0334

E-mail: yushujun@cicgamericas.com

Latin America Bureau (Mexico City)

Chief: Miao Ye

Tel: 52-55-55127271

Fax: 52-55-55332027

E-mail: chinahoymx@gmail.com

Peru Office (Lima)

Chief: Meng Kexin

Tel: 0051-959212702

E-mail: revistachinaperu@gmail.com

General Editorial Office

Tel: 86-10-68996252

Fax: 86-10-68326628

Editorial Desk

Tel: 86-10-68996250

Partnerships

Tel: 86-10-68995807

E-mail: yecong@cicgamericas.com

Distribution

Tel: 86-10-68310644

E-mail: circulation@cicgamericas.com

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WRITE TO US

Send an e-mail: xt@cicgamericas.com

Seeing Xinjiang Anew

By Yan Wei

This summer, China Cool has transcended social media to become a real-world travel phenomenon. The viral Western trend—celebrating relatively cool summer climate in many parts of China and the country’s modern cultural appeal—has turned into boarded flights and packed itineraries. Xinjiang is part of the draw.

From the grasslands north of the Tianshan Mountains, which bisect Xinjiang, to the time-honored oasis towns in the south, international visitors are pouring in for sightseeing as well as study tours, curious to see a region that has long occupied an outsized place in global imagination.

For many travelers, Xinjiang still begins with its landscapes. The region possesses some of the most stunning scenery in China: awe-inspiring mountains, vast deserts, alpine lakes and endless grasslands where herders guide horses beneath impossibly wide skies. Visitors gather along the shores of Sayram Lake in the western Tianshan Mountains, hike through the forests of Buerjin (Burqin) County nestled in the Altai Mountains in north Xinjiang, and enjoy relaxing getaways at the Nanshan resort on the outskirts of Urumqi.

Perhaps the most striking change in Xinjiang tourism is not the number of visitors, but the way many of them are choosing to travel. Increasingly, travelers are moving beyond postcard destinations and stepping into ordinary life. They wander through neighborhood bazaars, drink tea with local families, visit rural villages and tour factories that produce everything from wind turbines to robots. In doing so, they encounter a Xinjiang that often feels far more layered and human than the version presented through distant headlines.

The region’s ethnic diversity is impossible to miss. Uyghur music drifts through evening markets. Kazak traditions remain visible on grasslands. Hui, Mongolian and other communities contribute to a cultural landscape shaped by centuries of migration and exchange.

Ecological progress has become a particularly notable feature of the region’s transformation. In parts of Xinjiang once associated primarily with desertification, local authorities have invested heavily in water management,

reforestation and renewable energy. Solar and wind farms now stretch across the region, while many former barren areas have been turned into eco-tourism zones. Travelers often encounter an ambitious attempt to redefine how development and environmental protection coexist in some of China’s most geographically fragile regions.

At the same time, Xinjiang’s engagement with the outside world has accelerated. International cultural festivals, trade fairs and tourism events are thriving. Sister-city relations continue to expand, most recently exemplified by the August signing of a letter of intent between Maigaiti (Makit) County, Kashi (Kashgar) Prefecture, and Bektemir District, Tashkent City, Uzbekistan. On March 19, Yining International Airport in Yili (Ili) Kazak Autonomous Prefecture officially launched permanent international operations, adding a new regular international air gateway to the region. It is now Xinjiang’s third airport open to overseas traffic, following Urumqi Tianshan International Airport and Kashi Laining International Airport.

The importance of overseas visitors in shaping Xinjiang’s international image is beyond question. But what may matter more in the long run is the role of travelers themselves. In the age of social media, tourists no longer simply consume experiences; they document and broadcast them instantly. A short video filmed in a Kashi alleyway or a photo from a village homestay can reach millions within hours. These personal accounts introduce nuance into conversations that are often dominated by abstraction and distance.

The result is a new kind of tourism, one shaped as much by curiosity as by sightseeing. Visitors leave talking about conversations with shopkeepers, shared meals, local music and unexpected hospitality. For them, Xinjiang is becoming a place experienced directly rather than imagined from afar.

In a fragmented information environment, seeing a place with one’s own eyes remains one of the few ways to challenge stereotyped narratives. This summer’s influx of visitors is a sign that more people are willing to make that journey—not only across borders, but beyond assumptions as well. **XT**

CONTENTS



IN FOCUS

14

THE SOUND OF A REGION

Professors explore Xinjiang’s culture and innovation

20

AN AUGUST ENCOUNTER WITH HETIAN

International students trace history through living traditions

24

STEPPING IN AND RETHINKING

Peking University students reconsider Xinjiang through firsthand encounters

EDITORIAL

01

Seeing Xinjiang Anew

SNAPSHOTS

06

Alpine Splendor

FACTS & FIGURES

12

Real Money for Real Benefits

OPINION

30

Records Revisited

New books offer a comprehensive guide to Xinjiang's history

34

A Month in Motion

French traveler finds fresh faces and familiar fields on cross-region drive

38

The Refrigeration Revolution

Cold chain logistics is carrying fruit farther and faster

Cover Photo: The Grape Valley in Tulufan (Turpan) (COURTESY PHOTO)

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42

Echoes of Chawuhu Culture

Archaeology illuminates an ancient pastoral society

FEATURES

46

The Oasis Outreach

XPCC shares agricultural innovation and ecological progress

50

Art on the Move

Xinjiang's stories reach Beijing through performing arts

54

Pomegranate Power

Girls' soccer builds friendships across diverse communities

58

Beyond the Medals

Regional Games bring together culture, competition and commerce

62

Verses Across the Desert

Shared service inspires friendship, poetry and lasting memories

THROUGH THEIR EYES

66

Tulufan: One of China's Most Resilient Cities

Ancient ingenuity sustains life in extreme desert conditions

CLOSE-UP

70

Tulufan Is Hot, Hot, Hot!

Thriving in China's most scorching city

76

Cool Under Pressure

Extreme heat powers Tulufan's industrial testing economy

DISCOVER

80

Grapes, Gardens And Gorgeous Views

A one-day itinerary for Tulufan

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Xinjiang: Beyond Imagination



SNAPSHOTS

ALPINE SPLENDOR

A high-angle photograph of a vibrant turquoise river winding through a lush green forest. The river is filled with white rapids and numerous dark rocks protruding from the water. In the bottom left corner, a red inflatable raft with several people is navigating a turbulent section of the river. The surrounding forest is dense with tall evergreen trees, and the background shows rolling green hills under a clear sky.

Hosting rafting adventures has become an ecologically sustainable source of income for the local community

Located in the Altai Mountains, on China's border with Kazakhstan, Russia and Mongolia, Kanas Lake is one of the country's most pristine and enchanting alpine ecosystems. Legend has it the lakebed is the famed secret resting place of Genghis Khan's remains. Surrounded by glaciers, snowy peaks and taiga forests, the lake has supported generations of Tuvan people, one of the oldest nomadic groups in north China, who now open their villages to visitors. **XT**

(Text and photos by Wei Yao)

SNAPSHOTS





Tourists queue at a lookout to photograph the evening scenery of a Tuvan village on August 11

SNAPSHOTS





1	2
3	

1. Fed by glacier meltwater, the Kanas Lake ecosystem is highly sensitive to global warming

2. Inside the Kanas Lake scenic area, a bookstore sells creative products inspired by local culture

3. A squirrel in the scenic area nibbles a cracker left by a visitor

Real Money for Real Benefits

(1 yuan ≈ \$0.14)

**298.05
billion yuan**

Spending on programs aimed at improving people's living standards from January to July, accounting for 76.9 percent of the regional government's general public budget expenditure during the same period

**2.063
billion yuan**

2026 childcare subsidies disbursed by the end of August, benefiting more than 600,000 infants and young children under 3 years old. Parents can apply for this subsidy, which stands at 3,600 yuan per year, both online and offline

**111
million yuan**

Subsidies for seniors with moderate to severe disabilities disbursed in January, the month when the regional government rolled out this policy. Eligible recipients can receive up to 800 yuan per month

**25.053
billion yuan**

Pension insurance subsidies issued by the regional government this year

**8.286
billion yuan**

Subsidies for assistance programs for people in need issued by the regional government this year



A nursing home in Jimusaer (Jimsar) County, Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture, on March 24 (VCG)

FACTS & FIGURES

**10.229
billion yuan**

Subsidies for basic medical insurance for rural and non-working urban residents issued by the regional government this year

**7.633
billion yuan**

The regional government's subsidies for health programs this year

2.2 billion yuan

Spending by the regional government in constructing and renovating school buildings, outdoor playgrounds and campus cafeterias this year

580 million yuan

Regional government spending in purchasing classroom multimedia equipment this year

(Source: A September 7 report in the Xinjiang Daily newspaper)



Primary school students take a break on the first day of the fall semester in Shawan County, Tacheng Prefecture, on August 25 (VCG)

IN FOCUS

THE SOUND OF A REGION

The arts, industries and developments of Xinjiang through fresh eyes *By Zhang Yage*



Visitors dance with residents of the Tuanjie Community at the community center in Kuerle (Korla) on August 13 (ZHANG YAGE)



In the 1950s, a young musician from Tianjin Municipality made a journey that would define the rest of his life. His name was Wan Tongshu. His mission was to save the Twelve Muqam, an ancient and complex musical tradition of the Uygur people, from disappearing forever.

He faced bitter cold, isolation and personal tragedy. At one point, he lost his son to pneumonia as he was too busy with work to get timely treatment for the baby. He transcribed, recorded and documented Muqam, ensuring that this intricate art form with roots stretching from ancient China's Western Regions to Central Asia and beyond would survive for future generations.

Later, his story was told on the silver screen. The film *Wan Tongshu*, produced by the Tianshan Film Studio, brings his life and legacy to audiences across China. Through Wan's story, the film showcased how Xinjiang's cultures are being preserved, celebrated, and shared with the world.

His story deeply touched a delegation of 13 professors from 10 countries, who visited Xinjiang from August 10 to 17, traveling to Urumqi, Kuerle (Korla) and Aksu, among other cities in the region. They toured film studios and heritage museums, walked through ancient alleys and smart farms, and sat down with local communities. They witnessed how Xinjiang preserves its traditions while embracing innovation.

Preserved cultures

On the first day of their itinerary, they gathered at the Tianshan Film Studio to watch *Wan Tongshu* and tour the facilities that have produced some of China's most celebrated films about ethnic group cultures.

As Muhammad Arif Khan from Pakistan, who works as an associate professor at Jilin International Studies University in northeast China, observed, Muqam has a resonance that transcends borders.

"Muqam is very important in as far as the Xinjiang history is concerned," Khan told *Xinjiang Today*. "Wan Tongshu came from Tianjin to Xinjiang in the 1950s and he dedicated his lifetime to preserving Muqam. He overcame difficulties. He lost his son because of the very cold weather in Xinjiang at that time, but he tried his best to preserve Muqam."

Khan noted that Muqam is not only popular in Central Asia but also in South Asia. "In Pakistan and India, we call it 'qawwali,'" he said. "It's like a different dialect but having the same roots. This story can resonate strongly with our people."

The film, Khan said, has a crucial role to play in shaping how the world sees China. "The movie will play a very crucial role as far as the soft image of China is concerned," he added, "because this movie tells us about the government effort to restore and preserve Muqam and the history of ethnic groups in China."

"I think people should come to Xinjiang, they should come to Urumqi and see, witness what's happening in Xinjiang. How the Central Government in Beijing is taking care of the ethnic minorities, not only in terms of culture but economics, political status and livelihood standards. They come and they receive from their own eyes and then they will draw a meaningful conclusion," Khan added.

"The movie was very real and touching, and the scenes actually took me back to the 1950s when I was born and saw the changes of my family. The film factory has done a great job recreating the past," Daniel Sluse, Dean of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Liege, Belgium, told *Xinjiang Today*. "I believe the movie would appeal to international audiences in many ways. It is about love, family, dedication and friendship."

The studio behind the film is itself a living monument. Established in 1959 as one of 16 state-run film studios approved by the State Council, the highest state administrative organ, the Tianshan Film Studio has produced over 130 films and more than 30 television series over its 67-year history. Ten of its films and three of its television dramas have won the "Five One Project" Award, one of China's highest honors for cultural works.

The studio has also sent some of its films to five continents, screened in dozens of countries, allowing Xinjiang's stories to become an important window through which the world sees China. Of its 113 staff members, 90 are technical professionals, making up roughly 80 percent of the workforce; and 52 are from ethnic minority groups.

The preservation of culture is not limited to music. In the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, which opened its doors in 2024, visitors can see the breadth of the region's traditions. The museum, covering 13,088 square meters, is organized into four basic exhibition ►

halls, covering themes like festivals, daily life, wedding customs, and intangible heritage from other provinces, alongside five thematic galleries. Since its trial opening in September 2025, the museum has received nearly 100,000 visitors.

It regularly invites inheritors to perform and interact with visitors, bringing the traditions to life.

“Culture means more than preserving heritage. It acts as a bridge connecting people across generations. Cultural events, education, exchanges and intangible-heritage conservation enrich people’s spiritual life and showcase the region’s rich diversity,” Shiderina Gaukhar, a professor at Turan University in Kazakhstan, told *Xinjiang Today*.

Xinjiang has also established dedicated cultural preservation centers in areas where ethnic minorities are concentrated, ensuring that the traditions of individual ethnic groups are protected at the community level. In Bayingol Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture, which is home to a large Mongolian community, the Bohu County Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation and Transmission Center in the prefecture serves as a living repository of Mongolian cultural heritage.

The center, which opened in 2010, focuses on the traditions of the Mongolian community. It displays traditional Mongolian costumes, embroidery, products, the Saurden dance, Tuvian short-tune folk songs and the techniques of making and playing the Tovshuur, a traditional Mongolian stringed instrument. The center has been a key site for preserving the region’s four national-level intangible cultural heritage items of Mongolian people.

Diego Arbildo Prieto, Coordinator of International Relations at the Faculty of Technological Management and Innovations at ITMO University in Russia, said after visiting the center that what impressed him most was how the local people connect their culture with nature.

“What impressed me most was how this center preserves not just techniques, but a way of thinking—the deep connection between culture and nature,” Prieto said. “For instance, unlike the chemical-based approach common in Western medicine, the Mongolian traditions here integrate culture, plants and healing in a remarkably natural way. I think it’s very important to understand, listen to and respect this wisdom.”

Veysel Bozan, a professor at Ankara University’s Faculty of Communication in Türkiye, said that he was struck by the region’s religious and cultural diversity.

“I didn’t expect to find such richness here—mosques alongside old temples and different ethnic groups living together,” he said. What impressed him even more was how these cultures remain alive. “In many parts of the world, minority cultures become assimilated over time. But here, they are still going strong. The folk culture is still living. People maintain their own practices, their own religions and they are protected in doing so.”



International visitors at an exhibition near the Tianshan Shengli Tunnel in Urumqi on August 12 (ZHANG YAGE)

Strengthened unity

From the living traditions of music, dance and medicine, the delegation’s journey turned toward a deeper layer of Xinjiang’s story—its ancient roots in Chinese civilization. In the city of Luntai, the Western Regions Frontier Command Museum stands as a testimony to a history that stretches back over two millennia.

The Western Regions Frontier Command, established by the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) in 60 B.C., was the first central government office to govern the Western Regions (covering Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region). Its establishment formally incorporated this vast territory into China’s administrative system.

The museum, which opened to the public on May 18, 2025, covers 10,000 square meters. Its permanent exhibition is organized into seven sections that trace the establishment of the Western Regions Frontier Command and the effective gover-



nance of Xinjiang by central authorities since the Han Dynasty.

For Zoon Ahmed Khan, a researcher at the Center for International Security and Strategy of Tsinghua University and the Center for China and Globalization in Beijing, the museum offered a powerful reminder of how cooperation between central authorities and regional populations has historically led to prosperity.

“There was abundant historical evidence that whenever they (the Western Regions and the Central Government) worked together, the Western Regions flourished,” she said. “And I think that’s what matters. Like any historic civilization, there are periods when different groups might not be eye to eye. But we see that in the case of Xinjiang, especially when the Central Government and the people of Xinjiang were on the same page, they always found ways to cooperate.” She also noted how museums like this one are helping bridge the gap between eastern and western parts of modern China. “Until recently, there wasn’t

a lot of opportunity for people from eastern parts of China to come to the western parts,” she said. “They know the history, they know the Silk Road. But increasingly, these cultures within Xinjiang are becoming more familiar for people in east China. When they come to the museum, they can learn more deeply about the history and how collective it has always been.”

Thelikada Kankanamge Asela Prabath Kumara from Sri Lanka, a postdoctoral researcher at East China Normal University, captured the sentiment of many visitors when he stood on the ancient ground. “Today, standing here, I truly feel the weight of history,” he told *Xinjiang Today*. “A place so far from the Central Plains was incorporated into the central governance system over 2,000 years ago. That in itself is an extraordinary chapter of history.”

Innovative frontiers

In addition to culture and history, the delegation also witnessed how Xinjiang is blending traditional knowledge with modern innovation, giving rise to specialty industries and new consumption scenarios.

At the Uygur Medicine Hospital in Urumqi, the delegation visited a Traditional Chinese Medicine Culture Education Base, which opened in 2025. The facility is divided into four exhibition halls covering the core concepts of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the history of medical exchanges along the Silk Road, Uygur medical theories, and the hospital’s seven decades of development. The base also offers hands-on activities including wellness education, herbal workshops and traditional exercise classes.

For Mohsen Ebrahimi, an associate professor of plant genetics and breeding at the University of Tehran, the visit resonated deeply with his own cultural background. “In Persian, we have a saying that there is a remedy in every plant,” he shared. “China and Iran share a long history of using medicinal plants for healing. I believe traditional medicine can complement Western medicine, because chemical treatments often have side effects, while plant-based remedies are generally safer and have been used for centuries.”

Ebrahimi also saw great potential for collaboration. “Xinjiang has a vast and diverse environment with many endemic plant species. There is a huge opportunity for research and cooperation—exchanging plants, comparing their effects on diseases like diabetes and cancer, and developing new drugs based on natural ingredients.”

The delegation traveled to Kuerle to visit a Cloud Farm demonstration base, a 497-hectare smart agriculture project that exemplifies China’s rural revitalization efforts.

Rural revitalization is a strategy introduced in 2017 to modernize agriculture, improve rural living standards, strengthen

governance, and promote sustainable development in rural areas.

The Cloud Farm project consolidated over 110 fragmented plots into five standardized fields, integrating AI-powered water and fertilizer systems, precision irrigation, and advanced mulching techniques to address the water scarcity that plagues south Xinjiang's arid regions.

The results have been remarkable. Water usage per hectare dropped from 12,000 to 4,200 cubic meters, a 65-percent reduction, while fertilizer efficiency increased by 30 percent. Cotton yields rose from 5.25 to 7.8 tons per hectare, a 48.6-percent increase. The farm also serves as a public classroom, training over 20,000 farmers annually and turning them from passive recipients into active adopters of smart farming techniques.

Prieto was impressed by the scale and sophistication of the operation. "This is a good example to show the world that China is offering more than products—it's offering services and technology," he said. "The AI irrigation system, the drones, the digital management are all very advanced."

He also commented on the broader implications of China's technological advancement. "China is entering to set standards and rules that companies and countries around the world will follow. That's why many people see China as a model to follow. In the next three to five years, I think China's role in global AI governance will become even more important."

Arif Khan noted the implications for his home country. "We saw very advanced technology applied in the cotton field—drones, drip irrigation, digital systems managing miles of fields," he said. "These technologies and management methods are now being shared with Pakistan through the Belt and Road Initiative. I believe China and Pakistan have great potential for collaboration in smart agriculture and infrastructure."

The delegation also saw how tourism is transforming local communities. At Bosten Lake, the largest inland freshwater lake in Xinjiang, what was once a modest fishing



International tourists make pottery under the guidance of Uyghur craftsmen in Kuche on August 15 (ZHANG YAGE)

"We saw very advanced technology applied in the cotton field—drones, drip irrigation, digital systems managing miles of fields. These technologies and management methods are now being shared with Pakistan through the Belt and Road Initiative."

—Arif Khan

village has been developed into a thriving 5A-level (or the highest level) scenic attraction. The lake now features water parks, ferry cruises, recreational facilities, and signature events including fishing festivals, winter fishing with giant nets, and ice sailing competitions. The lake's water quality has improved, supporting both ecological conservation and tourism.

Zoon Ahmed Khan described the transformation as remarkable. "The government's efforts protected the environment as well as created economic opportunities and gave people a better quality of life," she said. "You could see families relaxing, people enjoying the beach, and the fish being protected. It talks about the many efforts the Chinese Government has made to improve the lives of people in Xinjiang."

In Kuche (Kuqa), the delegation walked through the Kuche Ancient Alley, a 1.2-km lane in the heart of Kuche's old city center



A visit to the Bohu County Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation and Transmission Center in Bayingol Mongolian Autonomous Prefecture on August 13 (ZHANG YAGE)

that preserves the street patterns 100 years ago. Home to 12 century-old trees and 10 ancient residences, the alley was revitalized through a “micro-renovation” approach that preserved its historic character while introducing 55 new businesses. In 2025, it received 2 million visitors and generated 210 million yuan (\$31 million) in tourism revenue.

“I talked to many families who are living in the alley and running their business with the vast number of tourists at peak season. It’s great to see that they don’t need to move to other areas, nor relinquish their old ancestral house to make a living,” she added.

Beyond the revitalized alleyways and tourist destinations, the delegation also stepped into ordinary communities to observe how daily life is lived and supported at the grassroots level. In Kuerle’s Tuanjie Community, a 1,500-square-meter service center embodies a philosophy of “one room, multiple uses.” The facility offers a cafeteria for seniors, a reading area, calligraphy and painting rooms, a wellness center with moxibustion therapy, dance studios, table tennis rooms, and outdoor spaces including a cultural square and basketball court, all provided free to local residents.

For Somayeh Taheri, Assistant to the Dean of the College of Science at the University of Tehran’s Central Laboratory, from

Iran, the visit offered a glimpse into how governance translates into everyday care.

“What I observed today was very fantastic,” she told *Xinjiang Today*. “There were facilities for dancing, calligraphy, sports, and massage instruments that I tried, it was very good. They also have services for elderly people, exactly what communities need. When people get older, they need a calm place where they can gather easily and find friends to spend time with.”

Taheri was particularly struck by the fact that all these services are provided free of charge. “The community government is doing great,” she said. “You can see it in the river, the bridges, the businesses—all of it affects people’s daily life. This is the best way for older people to release their energy, especially through dancing and sports. I really enjoyed dancing with them.”

“When you go to the service center and walk by the river, you get to see the real aspect of the local people. You can talk with them, and it’s very real,” Taheri added. “Last night we were out very late and it was quiet. The people were so nice. I didn’t expect this place to be so green, so beautiful, so organized.” **XT**

IN FOCUS

AN AUGUST ENCOUNTER WITH HETIAN

International students explore Hetian's heritage *By Xiang Yuting*

L

Late on the summer night of August 6, drums and horns rose over Yotkan Ancient City in Hetian (Hotan).

As the cry “Open the city!” rang out, the ancient city seemed to awaken from history. There was no stage and no fixed seating; the story of the Kingdom of Khotan (232 B.C.-A.D. 1006) unfolded through streets, courtyards and squares. Among the crowd that night were 21 international students from Zhejiang University, from 18 countries. When the actors playing the king and queen walked through the audience, history and the present briefly shared the same space.

Khotan, the name of Hetian in ancient times, was an important oasis on the southern

route of the Silk Road.

Today's Yotkan Ancient City is a cultural and tourism complex reconstructed on the basis of archaeological findings from the underground ruins of Yotkan, an important site of ancient Khotan. The name “Yotkan” is said to carry a local meaning of “the land of kings.” Archaeological discoveries from beneath have yielded numerous artifacts bearing witness to exchanges and interactions among different civilizations.

It is against this historical backdrop that *The Music of All Lands Resounds in Khotan*, an immersive outdoor production inspired by the history and culture of ancient Khotan, has found its home here.

For these international students who traveled through Xinjiang from August 4 to 10, it is one of the most unforgettable nights of the journey. “Of my whole journey through Xinjiang, what impressed me most was the night in Yotkan Ancient City,”



A mooncake mold in the Hetian Museum on August 6 (XIANG YUTING)



International students from Zhejiang University experience the weaving of Atlas silk on August 9 (XIANG YUTING)

Alice Kuhn Ozawa from Canada said.

The performance ended, but the exchanges it portrayed did not—they live on in Hetian's jade, silk and carpets, where people from different directions once met and created something new.

Jade's long journey

On August 6, at the Hetian Jade Museum, French student Lucie Marie Godallier began to understand why Chinese people value jade so highly. "I used to think it was just a beautiful stone," she said.

Hetian jade is mainly found in the Kunlun Mountains. As early as the Neolithic Age, people at the foot of the mountains had begun

*Jade linked
people and places
separated by
mountains and
distance, open-
ing Hetian to the
wider world early
in its history*

using it. Over time, jade traveled eastward to the Central Plains, the heartland of ancient China that covers the middle and lower reaches of the Yellow River, forming an ancient route later known as the Jade Road—one that predated the Silk Road.

Jade later came to stand for virtue, ritual and spiritual ideals. It linked people and places separated by mountains and distance, opening Hetian to the wider world early in its history.

"Now I like it too," Godallier said with a smile.

Lin Joan, from Austria, was particularly struck by jade's presence. In her view, behind every piece of jade carefully carved and polished by artisans lies a long tradition. ▶

Besides, from solemn ritual objects and personal ornaments to treasures collected by aristocrats and everyday objects carrying wishes for good fortune, people continue to give jade new meanings.

Encounters in silk

On August 9, in a workshop in Jiya Township, the rhythmic sound of a wooden loom filled the room. Silk threads, prepared through the traditional process of resist-dyeing the warp, were arranged on the loom. As the weaver's hands moved back and forth, colors that had once seemed separate gradually intertwined, and vivid, flowing patterns began to emerge.

The international students gathered around the loom. Some recorded the process on their phones. Others leaned in to ask questions. A few, guided by the artisans, tried weaving a small section of fabric themselves.

For someone encountering the making of Atlas silk for the first time, it is difficult to imagine that the brilliantly colored fabric before their eyes began as bundles of delicate threads.

China was among the earliest places in the world to develop mulberry cultivation, sericulture and silk production. A long-standing legend about how sericulture reached ancient Khotan was recorded by the Tang Dynasty (618-907) monk Xuanzang in *The Great Tang Records on the Western Regions*.

According to the story, Khotan once had no mulberry trees or silkworms. Seeking to acquire the technology, the king requested a marriage alliance with a dynasty in the Central Plains. A princess who traveled west to marry him is said to have hidden mulberry seeds and silkworm eggs inside her headdress, bringing them across the frontier and into the oasis.

The legend may not reveal every detail of history. But it indicates that, through contact between people, sericulture made its way to Khotan, took root there and eventually continued its journey outward.

Yet the local silk-making techniques did not simply reproduce the styles of the Central Plains. Over the centuries, sericulture and silk production blended with local weaving traditions, dyeing techniques and aesthetic preferences. Artisans developed a distinctive method of resist-dyeing the warp threads before weaving them into cloth, creating Atlas silk with its flowing patterns and intense colors.

The traces of such cultural creation are not found only in light, flowing silk. In Hetian, handmade carpets—dense and heavy—also preserve the marks of exchanges along the Silk Road.

During their trip, the students also visited the Nakexiwan Carpet Factory, where flowers, leaves and geometric patterns spread across carpets in vivid colors.



International students from Zhejiang University search for Hetian jade at a jade site in Hetian on August 6 (XIANG YUTING)

While preserving local cultural traditions, carpet-making also absorbed artistic influences from different regions. And they remain deeply embedded in local life. Weaving skills continue to be passed down from generation to generation, while patterns evolve with changing tastes. In 2008, the Uyghur carpet-weaving tradition was included on China's national list of intangible cultural heritage.

Today, traditional weaving techniques are still practiced at the Nakexiwan Carpet Factory, and carpets from Hetian continue to travel far beyond the oasis where they were made.

Where roads converge

Two seemingly ordinary objects in the Hetian Museum make



Carpet ornaments featuring different patterns on display at the Nakexiwan Carpet Factory in Hetian on August 9 (XIANG YUTING)

those exchanges even more tangible: a block of salt and a wooden mooncake mold.

For people today, salt is an everyday necessity. But modern resource surveys show that Hetian does not produce edible salt. During the Han and Jin dynasties (206 B.C.-A.D. 420), the salt needed by people living here had to be brought in as a commodity from elsewhere. A small block of salt thus became evidence of trade and exchange across geographical boundaries.

The wooden mooncake mold has four Chinese characters carved into its center: “Cantonese-style egg yolk.” Dough filled with ingredients would be pressed into the mold, shaped and then baked in an oven.

Discovered in Hetian, the mold recorded another kind of

movement: as people traveled and communities interacted, festival traditions from the Central Plains made their way here, while belt hooks, bronze mirrors, longevity locks, porcelain and tea drinking also became part of local life. Handled cups from Central and West Asia also added new colors to the region’s material culture.

Before coming to Xinjiang, Zoe Y Kit Lit, from New Zealand, had worried about something. And the trip changed her view. “I used to think that, as in many parts of the world, some groups that are not numerically dominant would gradually lose their languages, cultures and customs through integration,” she said. But in Xinjiang, she saw something different: Uygur, Kazak and other ethnic cultures were being protected and passed down.

It led her to rethink what “integration” could mean. Integration does not necessarily mean one culture replacing another. Nor does it require everyone to become the same. Different cultures can retain their own languages, traditions and ways of life while building connections and mutual understanding through long-term interaction.

For Myanmar student Nang Seng Hom, the journey raised another question: What does cross-cultural communication really mean?

Myanmar is world-famous for its jadeite, while Hetian’s nephrite enjoys equal renown. That parallel gave her a sense of familiarity in a place far from home.

“As international students, we are, in a way, doing cross-cultural communication without even realizing it,” she said. “And this trip to Xinjiang showed me one way it can happen. It is not about simply telling you about my culture. It is about seeing each other in the same place.”

“It is a place of convergence—where mountains meet deserts, oases meet wilderness, and different ethnic groups, cultures and stories come together,” she added.

Avendano Chin Liaying Rebecca, from Panama, noticed one such connection. Panama and Xinjiang differ greatly in climate, architecture and ethnic composition. Yet in her interactions with local people, she found something that reminded her of Latin America: Whether welcoming guests or simply enjoying themselves, people like to sing and dance.

For her, those moments became some of the most memorable of the journey. **XT**

IN FOCUS

STEPPING IN AND RETHINKING

Complex realities beyond familiar narratives *By Xiang Yuting*

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From August 12 to 18, 17 international students from Peking University, representing 14 countries, joined a study tour titled Understanding Contemporary China, Perceiving Open Xinjiang.

Over seven days, they traveled from Hami to Kashi (Kashgar), visiting industrial parks, businesses, villages, trade fairs and urban communities—trying to understand a place they had previously known mostly through books and media reports.

Yet they seemed to take away more than just a deeper knowledge of Xinjiang. More importantly, they began to reconsider a larger question: How should people come to know Xinjiang—and the world at large?

The Xinjiang they thought they knew

Before the trip, the students were not totally unfamiliar with the region.

For Phan Long Nhat, from Viet Nam, his knowledge was vivid: high mountains, grasslands, deserts and vast landscapes.

Kailil Abdel Quoddouse, from Morocco, recalled attaching certain labels to Xinjiang before the trip.

“These labels came from news reports and fragmented information,” he said.

Other students also arrived carrying similar preconceptions.

But once they saw the region for themselves, they found reality far more complex than any label, photograph or statistics could convey.

The tour began in Hami. Before visiting the city, the students’ first impression may well have been a slice of Hami melon at breakfast—juicy, fragrant and lingeringly sweet.

At the Hami Melon Fresh Fruit Industry Chain Platform Service Center, they were introduced to a complete industrial system encompassing germplasm research and cultivation, certification, warehousing, logistics, processing and sales.

After four years, the platform has grown to comprise five centers dedicated respectively to improving seed varieties, setting standards, brand promotion, cold-chain logistics and settlement; three platforms for domestic sales, international barter trade and supply-chain finance; an industrial cluster; and an incubator.

When Umetbekova Aijamal Cholponovna, from Kyrgyzstan, first tasted a Hami melon, her reaction was simple: “Delicious.”

Seeing the agricultural technology and modern industries behind it, she came to perceive an intricate industrial system, not

just a fruit.

This was what Kailil later called “working out the small, tangible numbers.”

Where does a melon come from? How is it grown better, graded, transported and sold? And how can more ordinary people benefit from the industry? Once such concrete questions come into view, “development” is no longer an abstract word.

What the details revealed

If a Hami melon shows that a place’s development lives in everyday details, the thriving wind energy sector in Balikun (Barkol) Kazak Autonomous County reveals another side of Xinjiang.

Nhat’s image of Xinjiang had been shaped largely by mountains, grasslands and deserts.

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In Balikun, he found that its abundant natural resources were fueling modern industries.

The Sanenergy Gigawatt-level Smart Wind Power Equipment Manufacturing Industrial Park is a major local new-energy project. It represents an investment of 9 billion yuan (\$1.34 billion) across wind power equipment manufacturing, energy storage and wind-powered hydrogen and ammonia; its main turbine base became operational in November 2023.

Here the wind is no longer just part of its natural character; harnessed for energy, it links manufacturing, technology and the local economy.

After seeing clean energy equipment up close, the students found yet another side of Xinjiang—its outward reach—in Kashi.

The 16th Kashi Central & South Asia ▶



International students from Peking University pose for a group photo in Aletun Ancient Street in Hami on August 14 (XIANG YUTING)



Umetbekova Aijamal Cholponovna plays chess with a boy at the Service Center of the Donghu Community in Kashi (Kashgar) on August 17 (XIANG YUTING)

Commodity Fair ran from August 14 to 18, with Uzbekistan as guest country of honor and Guangdong as guest province of honor.

Companies and representatives from 44 countries and regions gathered for trade, investment and cooperation opportunities.

Launched in 2005, the fair has become a vital platform linking China with Central and South Asian markets. Leveraging this role, Kashi has shifted from a local trade hub to a gateway opening up to the wider world.

In the students' eyes, a picture of Xinjiang took shape: a region devoted to home-grown development and serving as an open window on the world.

An immersive experience of community life

As the journey moved from Hami to Kashi, the students kept

observing and exploring Xinjiang.

Yet what quietly changed the course of their journey was a seemingly unremarkable stop: the Donghu Community in Kashi.

Entering the community's Service Center, they passed a game room where residents of diverse age groups played cards and chess on an ordinary afternoon.

Still, one student whispered to a companion: "Could the people inside be 'actors'?"

Such doubts had arisen more than once during the journey, and the skepticism was understandable. Most of the students were pursuing master's degrees in fields ranging from international relations and law to business and computer science. Accustomed to reading, analyzing and questioning, they were not inclined to set aside their doubts after a few visits.

But what happened next turned them from observers into



Members of a Peking University international student delegation at the Sanenergy Gigawatt-Level Smart Wind Power Equipment Manufacturing Industrial Park on August 14 (XIANG YUTING)

participants.

At first the students gathered to watch two boys play chess. One quickly gained a decisive lead and the game ended without suspense.

Umetbekova then sat down and challenged the winner.

After nearly 20 minutes, with each side left with just two pieces, Umetbekova said, “It’s a draw.”

Onlookers also seemed ready to applaud the friendly “happy ending.”

But the boy said nothing. He pressed his lips together and looked up at Umetbekova—shy, yet unmistakably firm.

Umetbekova understood. Instead of saying “It’s a draw” again, she asked, “Do you accept a draw?”

The boy remained silent. His eyes returned to the board, and he kept thinking.

The game went on. In the end, the boy won.

Only then did the applause begin.

No one had arranged for the child to win as part of a performance. Nor did the staff need to prove anything to the students. Once they had sat down at the board, there was no longer any need to explain what was real.

The students also tried Chinese calligraphy, drumming and basketball. Scenes they had only watched became experiences they joined.

By the time they left, no one was asking whether the people in the game room had been “actors.”

How to share real stories

For Kailil, the most unforgettable moments were precisely those never on the itinerary.



Baillargeon Lea practices Chinese calligraphy at the Service Center of the Donghu Community on August 17 (XIANG YUTING)

Seeing children play soccer in Kashi's ancient city, he said their laughter recalled his own childhood. "It felt like coming home."

That feeling has inspired him to rethink how to introduce Xinjiang to others.

As a student of Chinese language education, he believes that empty words carry little weight. He chooses a different approach.

He said he will present Xinjiang through small, tangible details: How many links does an industrial chain connect? How does a company work with farmers? How many mundane matters does a community handle daily?

Zheng Jingyi, from Singapore, reached a similar conclusion. Previously accustomed to understanding a region through policies, data and broad concepts from books, she grew aware that a place's true character lies in concrete details. It lies in a conversation with a child, an interaction with an ordinary resident, the cooperation between farmers and businesses.

For Baillargeon Lea, from Canada, the trip made one thing clear: True understanding comes not from books alone, but from one real encounter after another.

She said she found the Hami she saw more vivid and full of

life than the one in books.

At the start of the trip, the students set out from different sources—photographs, books, news reports, data and concepts.

Seven days later, they took home a Hami melon's fragrance, a piece of handmade pottery, a miniature musical instrument, a scarf from an international fair and the memory of losing a chess game to a local boy.

These things could hardly differ more, yet together they formed the Xinjiang they had come to know.

More importantly, the students realized that understanding a place does not mean simply finding a single answer to define it—because Xinjiang is not a single story.

Perhaps that is the journey's most valuable lesson: Sometimes the best way to understand the world is not to hear someone else's answer, but to step inside it and become part of the story. **XT**