

Xinjiang Is Undergoing Unprecedented Economic Development

by Christine Bierre

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PARIS, Sept. 20—Here are my observations following a study trip to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, from August 18 to 22, in the company of several other journalists, editors and analysts, in search of the truth about this region which has been the subject of much ink in recent years. This was my second trip to Xinjiang (I had already been there in 2019), which enabled me to see things with a certain distance.

Let's briefly recall that Anglo-American and Western propaganda against China, the U.S.A.'s "systemic rival," accuses China of nothing less than organizing the "genocide" of the Uyghurs—an ethnic group that represents around 45% of the region's total population—by locking them up by the millions in "concentration camps" in Xinjiang, forbidding the Uyghurs to speak their language, enjoy their culture and practice their faith, and of using them as slave labor (among other things, for cotton production).

Most of these accusations come openly from the U.S. secret services, notably via Radio Free Asia, originally founded by the CIA and funded to this day by the U.S. Congress, and Adrien Zenz, a German Christian fundamentalist and researcher emeritus at the Washington-based Victims of Communism Foundation.

Everything we saw on our trip belies these accusations.

Xinjiang today is, in fact, a very dynamic, fast-developing region, having managed to fend off the

strategy of terror, pursued since the 1990s by a Western camp determined to impose its hegemony over Eurasia by fomenting ethnic and religious dissent among its rivals, and resorting to forms of irregular warfare such as terrorism. The Museum of Extremism and De-Radicalization in Xinjiang's capital city Urumqi, which we visited, details all the attacks suffered by Xinjiang since those times, as well as the role of groups militating for the independence of East Turkestan, supported by the U.S. and its Western allies.

China is winning this war, thanks to a dual strategy. On the one hand, it is applying the full force of the law



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A display at the Museum of Extremism and De-Radicalization of a collection of knives, machetes, and axes confiscated by Chinese authorities from Uyghur terrorists. Urumqi. Aug. 17, 2023.

to the extremists behind attacks as deadly as those we saw in France in 2015. On the other hand, it is offering a strong economic development alternative to those others who have committed only minor offences, and who wish to live in peace with the Han people (91% of the Chinese population) and other ethnic groups living in the region.

It is this policy that has enabled Xinjiang to regain stability and enjoy rapid economic development (see my 2019 [article](#) "Schiller Institute in China—Xinjiang Province: China Rejects All Accusations.")

Exchanges with Regional Leaders

In Urumqi, the region's capital, the officials with whom we were able to exchange views shed light on these issues. A clear sign of the pacification underway, tourism—essentially domestic tourists for the time being—is booming. According to Li Xuejun, former vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the Autonomous Region's People's Assembly, tourism rose from 190 million visitors in 2021 to 250 million in 2022, and is forecast to grow by 27.4% in 2023.

We also learned that this high-potential region, which accounts for 1/6 of China's national territory, with particularly fertile farmland (producing rice, wheat, corn, tomatoes and cotton) and significant mineral wealth (22% and 28% of oil and natural gas reserves, as well as coal and poly-silicon, indispensable for the manufacture of solar panels), is also an increasingly important crossroads for trade with the countries of Central Asia.

From August 17–20, 2023, 1,300 companies from 40 countries (including 25 of the world's top 500 companies) were represented at the China-Eurasia Merchandise Trade Expo in Xinjiang under the theme “Promoting the Spirit of the Silk Road, Strengthening Eurasian Cooperation.” Three other regional conferences on “high-quality” development were held in Xinjiang, focusing on oil, the chemical industry, textiles, fruit and vegetables, livestock breeding and renewable energies.

Meanwhile, from August 18–21, 26 delegates and permanent representatives of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) visited China at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss bilateral issues. They also addressed the situation of the Muslim community, visiting Urumqi, Kashgar, and the Hui Autonomous Prefecture of Changji and the Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture of Kizilsu, which are both part of Xinjiang. In the course of their talks, according to an Aug 23 [article](#) by Xinhua, “the diplomats reported seeing vibrant people, religious harmony, and cultural prosperity. ‘The Chinese government is committed to promoting the development and stability of Xinjiang,’” they concluded at the end of their visit.

Thus, under the watchful eye and thanks to the targeted economic aid provided by the Chinese government since 1999 (30% of Xinjiang's annual GDP) to this western region, which is rich in potential but underdeveloped, Xinjiang's GDP reached 1,770 billion yuan (\$240 billion, €225 billion) in 2022, up 3.2% from 2021, and continues to grow. For 2023, it is already up

5.20%. Household disposable income is said by local authorities to have reached 30,000 yuan (\$4,111) per year. By way of comparison, in 2022, China estimated that the annual income of those lifted out of extreme poverty would be around 14,000 yuan (\$1,919).

President Xi Jinping conducted a whirlwind visit to Urumqi on August 18, following on his return from the BRICS conference in Johannesburg, South Africa, to attend a meeting of senior Xinjiang officials. According to a [release](#) by the State Council:

[Xi] demanded thorough, meticulous, concrete, and sustained efforts to develop a beautiful Xinjiang that is united, harmonious, prosperous, and culturally advanced, with healthy ecosystems and people living and working in contentment, in the process of pursuing Chinese modernization.

The region is also the gateway to the New Silk Road to the West, which alone explains the Anglo-American demonization campaign against it. As reported by the *New Silk Road Discovery* website:

As of September 10, 2023, the number of China-Europe/Central Asia freight train trips passing through northwest China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region this year [so far] totalled 10,017, up 10.1% year on year, according to China Railway Urumqi Group Co. Ltd. Among them, 5,365 China-Europe/Central Asia trains passed through the Khorgos Railway Port, a year-on-year increase of 10.8%; 4,652 China-Europe/Central Asia trains passed through the Alashankou Railway Port, a year-on-year increase of 9.2%. Both ports are on the Xinjiang-Kazakhstan border.

Discovering Kashgar

Our visit to Kashgar, the capital of southern Xinjiang, began at around midnight, because our flight was delayed. The first thing we discovered was the extent of Western propaganda against China: the market, fully illuminated, was teeming with passers-by, taking advantage of the cool night to do their shopping.

A second discovery, particularly for those of us who had seen this large market in 2016, at that time the entrances to the market were secured by contingents of the forces of law and order: today, there was hardly any security presence. The third discovery was that 90% of



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The newly renovated Kashgar Grand Bazaar is a silent refutation of critics who say China is erasing Uyghur traditions and customs. It is one of the largest in Asia and has existed for two millennia. Its Uyghur vendors and their wares express their culture.

the people shopping there are Uyghurs, the very people China is said to be exterminating! Fourth discovery: this large market, which almost all the Western press reports has been “razed to the ground” as a final solution to Uyghur culture, not only still exists, but has been renovated in the same style as the old market, and you can buy all the products of Uyghur culture: spices, food, musical instruments, clothing, etc.

Drinking Water in Every Home

China has understood better than our so-called democracies that poverty is the breeding ground for extremism. To avoid extremism, we need to ensure economic development.

We next travelled to Payzivat (Jiashu) County, still in Kashgar Prefecture, where a project to harness snow and glacier water has brought water to almost all rural villages in southern Xinjiang. In the past, families were obliged to use donkeys to fetch water from reservoir dams or from mountain streams. Today, every home is equipped with a running water tap.

As the local groundwater is unfit for human consumption, due to the mineral-rich and arsenic-rich soil, engineers have tapped the mountaintops to collect water for the population, with all the difficulties of the terrain that this implies.

The program was launched in 2019, at a cost of 1.7 billion yuan (\$233 million, €225 million). It required the construction of 1,827 km of pipelines, 17 distribution plants and 16,800 pipes to deliver it to the homes of 15,300 residents. Thanks to this and other related projects, 90% of residents in southern Xinjiang now have access to tap water for all domestic uses, including showering.

Access to drinking water and a better knowledge of irrigation techniques specific to desert regions (drip irrigation) has encouraged households to embark on agricultural projects, notably the production of melons, watermelons, and very sweet quetsches, which we were able to taste at the restaurant, enabling them to further improve their income.



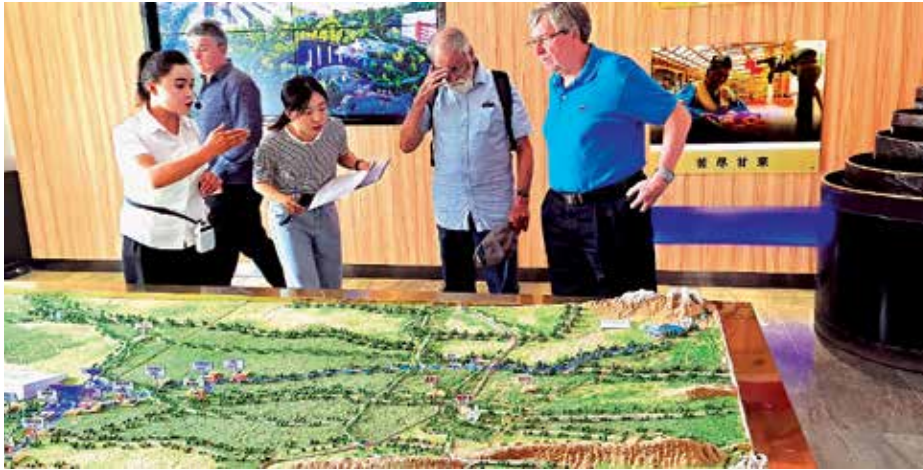
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Uyghur musical instruments and other products on sale in the Kashgar Grand Bazaar.

We were able to confirm this new comfort by meeting a family in Tierimu.

Cotton Production in the North

We then flew to Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, in the north of the Autonomous Region, and travelled



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A model of the Payzawat drinking water project, Kashgar prefecture.

to one of the main “slave labor camps” (according to Western propaganda)—the cotton fields of Shihezi, a sub-prefecture-level city in Xinjiang. A nightmare for Western geopoliticians, this sub-prefecture is administered by the People’s Liberation Army’s Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC). In 1949, at the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the government took up an old tradition and deployed this army corps, giving it the task of defending this territory on the borders of China. When the peace was not threatened, the soldiers devoted themselves to the development of agriculture in order to support the region’s economy.

Today, almost 75 years later, the XPCC has fulfilled its mission. At the end of the Gobi desert, this 460 km² vice-prefecture is now known as the “shining pearl in the middle of the desert,” rich in modern agricultural, industrial, mining and commercial enterprises, schools, universities and hospitals, and home to a population of almost 500,000. It is here in northern Xinjiang that much of the cotton of which China is the world’s leading producer and consumer, as well as its second largest exporter, is produced.

An umpteenth shock for visitors intoxicated by Western propaganda: cotton production here and throughout Xinjiang is 95% mechanized, thanks to drip irrigation and fertilizer and pesticide application tech-

niques, and the use of satellites for sowing and picking cotton.

Chinese state broadcaster CCTV published satellite images on April 6, 2022, showing autonomous vehicles equipped with the BeiDou Navigation System (BDS), preparing fields for the sowing season and Spring planting over an area of 1,333 hectares in Bachu county, Kashgar prefecture, Xinjiang. The large tractors supported by BDS, are capable of raking, fertilizing, sowing and laying drip irrigation strips,

all in a single pass. The plants grow in a straight line. More than 98% of cotton sowing in Xinjiang is carried out by BDS-supported machines, reports CCTV.

Xinjiang produced 5.129 million tons of cotton last year, accounting for 87% of the national output of 5.731 million tons, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Shihezi Proper

But back to Shihezi. The first thing we saw was an “extruder”—a rather barbaric name given, according to a fellow chemical engineer, to a machine that crushes granules, which are then transformed into long, flat plastic spinnerets lined with micro-holes, deployed alongside the sown plants, ensuring drip-free spreading. This process saves 30–50% of the required water and other inputs. We then saw the hundreds of machines used to spin the cotton into ready-to-use bobbins.



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Formerly, families in Payzawat used donkeys to fetch water from reservoirs. Today every home is equipped with running water, sourced from nearby mountaintops.

Attacks on Uyghur Culture?

Let’s turn now to the accusations against China’s Uyghur culture, which are as false as all the rest. In fact, it is the extremists, supported by Washington, who forbid their loved ones any connection with modernity: sports, artistic works, folk dances. On the contrary, China’s de-radicalization efforts reintroduce these practices, in the context of the necessary reintegration



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The HuaFang Shihezi Textile Company's cotton plantation. Production in Xinjiang is 95% mechanized, with drip irrigation, fertilizer and pesticide applications, sowing, and picking all guided by the BeiDou satellite navigation system. Aug. 20, 2023.

of these people into social life, not only with their own community but also with other ethnic groups.

The Chinese government's respect for Uyghur culture goes back a long way, as demonstrated by its support for Muqam theater in Xinjiang. These are collections of melodies and dances, both popular and classical, of great variety and richness, which have been elevated by UNESCO to the universal heritage of mankind. Threatened with extinction, the Chinese government has intervened on several occasions to ensure the survival of this art form, notably in 1965. The Xinjiang Theatre maintains a permanent troupe of hundreds of artists of great choreographic and musical quality, able to present at any time the great works of this classical repertoire, and in particular the famous 12 Xinjiang muqâm, carefully chosen from popular ballads, master poems and even classical Sufi poetry. See images.

Unfortunately, this type of performance is becoming increasingly rare, as few are capable of meeting the challenges of the work: over 300 pieces which, played in 12 instrumental and vocal suites, can last over 20 hours! We had the pleasure of attending a performance of three of them.

Does China Forbid Uyghurs To Practice Their Faith?

Finally, let's turn to this particularly dishonest accusation. Although it's difficult to know the exact number of practicing Muslims in China, credible estimates put the figure at 100 million Buddhists, 40 to 70 million Christians, with a sharp rise in Protestants, and 23 million practicing Muslims, including the Mandarin-speaking Hui ethnic group, which has lived in harmony with the Han for centuries. There are no fewer than 40,000 Muslim places of worship in Xinjiang!

Although Communist China initially fought religions, since Deng Xiaoping came to power following the Cultural Revolution, in particular, people have been able to practice the rite of their choice in a China that defines itself as one and multiple, with its 56 different ethnic groups. Historically, China welcomed religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

As long as religions do not become tools of political destabilization, such as Tibetan Buddhism in the style of the Dalai Lamas manipulated by the United States,



Painter: Ghazi Ahmet (1984). Photo: Christine Bierre

A detail of Muqam, one of the first paintings to represent Uyghur cultural life. Muqam refers to the diverse mix of instruments, songs, dances, and musical styles in Xinjiang.

or the rogue Islam of the supporters of the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement in Xinjiang, China not only does not prohibit these religions, but does everything in its power to ensure that the religions function in good conditions, by contributing to the expenses of places of worship, the printing of faith texts, and the regular activity of clerics.

The imams receive subsidies from the state as well as donations from individuals, and they also have secular occupations.

Enemies will of course, accuse China of taking outright control of the Muslim religion which is not true. But isn't this also a delicate problem everywhere, and particularly in France, where politicized imams inspired by the most extreme currents of Islam can find themselves preaching in mosques? It's up to each country, then, to develop the law that best avoids these pitfalls and guarantees freedom of worship for the vast majority. In France, most churches belong to local governments, and many cathedrals, to the State; elsewhere in Europe, Belgium funds the clergy of the six main denominations as well as the organized secular movement, and Germany donates 550 million euros a year to Catholic and Protestant churches.

In Urumqi, the president of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute, Abdureqip Tumulniyaz, showed us around the spacious premises of this Institute, founded in 1987 and further enlarged in 2014. This is where those who choose to follow the Muslim faith, and in particular Imams, are educated. This year, 300 students have been recruited. Courses are devoted to the Koran, knowledge of the constitution and law, culture and history.

Nor is there any attempt to eliminate the Uyghur language. Courses are taught in Arabic, Mandarin and Uyghur. Students have access to extensive libraries (45,000 books and 29,000 ebooks) in all three languages.

A 2020 report by the Islamic Association of Xinjiang, also chaired by Abdureqip Tumulniyaz, notes:

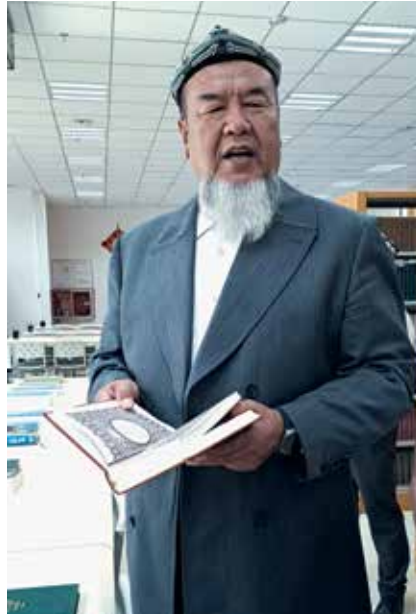
Muslim dietary habits, festivals, marriage and burial practices, customs and rituals are also respected in Xinjiang.

Thanks to strong government support, conditions in the mosques have generally improved, and they have been equipped with running water, electricity, natural gas, heating and means of communication.... In addition, governments at



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Abdureqip Tumulniyaz (left), President of the Xinjiang Islamic Institute of Scripture (above) where Islamic clergy are educated. Urumqi, Aug. 21, 2023.



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all levels in Xinjiang have taken effective measures to help religious organizations and schools improve their working and teaching conditions.

The Xinjiang Islamic Institute has built its new campus and eight branches across Xinjiang.

Since 1996, many Muslims have taken government-organized charter flights to make pilgrimages to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. To date, more than 50,000 Muslims from the region

have made these pilgrimages.

The right of religious leaders to participate in the deliberation and administration of state affairs is fully guaranteed.

More than 1,400 religious dignitaries from all ethnic groups in Xinjiang are deputies to the People's Assemblies, or members of committees of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference at all levels, to exercise the right to participate in the deliberation and administration of state affairs.

To say the least, this is a very fair system for framing the areas in which religious activities can develop, without prejudice to other religions or the State.

Here, then, is a brief overview of what's really going on in this province, and why it is being targeted by a demonization campaign waged by the United States and its allies around the world.