

Global Times: 'What I witnessed in Xinjiang will be seen by more visitors from West'

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Despite some Western political forces continuing to run smear campaigns against Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, they won't deter the people in the region from embracing peace and prosperity, nor will they halt Xinjiang society's steady development. Seeing is believing, and facts and truth will eventually debunk all lies.

In the "Xinjiang Upclose" series, the Global Times will publish conversations with and articles from scholars and observers from around the world who have visited the region, sharing their firsthand experience of traveling to Xinjiang and observing the daily lives of its people. Through their insights and experiences, we aim to present an authentic perspective on Xinjiang.

This is the sixth piece of the series.

Some US politicians' demonization of China over the Xinjiang issue seems never-ending. Backed by the vast US media apparatus, certain politicians launched a ferocious propaganda campaign, brazenly accusing China of committing "genocide" against Uygur Muslims in Xinjiang without a shred of evidence. Yet, after years of hype, US government allegations of "Xinjiang genocide" have never held up. The truth about Xinjiang is increasingly being witnessed by Western visitors, and the "hate affair" over Xinjiang among the American public is now fading.

I visited Xinjiang in November 2023 as part of a "China Is Not Our Enemy" delegation, determined to see the reality for myself. Unsurprisingly, I found no evidence of genocide - or even of oppression - against the Uygurs. I wrote about my experience in an article titled "Eyewitness Xinjiang," which later became a chapter in my new book, *Befriending China: People-to-People Peacemaking*.

I found a region full of surprises. We met and mingled with the people in Xinjiang, enjoying the International Grand Bazaar in Urumqi, where we met a young Uygur saleswoman who spoke near-perfect English. She told us she had learned the language at a school established under China's "targeted poverty alleviation program" - designed to equip unemployed Uygurs with vocational skills.

As we left the bazaar, we encountered a brilliant dance performance by a group of young Uygur women and men, who invited us to join them. We then went for a stroll, looking for a place to eat. All the store signs were in both Chinese and the Uygur language. Eventually, we settled into a Uygur restaurant and enjoyed a traditional dinner of shish kebabs, naan bread and a flavorful, spicy chicken stew. The staff were bilingual - conversing with our guide in Putonghua while speaking Uygur among themselves.

Following dinner, we wandered along the line of restaurants until we found a public washroom, just like the ones we had encountered in Shanghai and Beijing, and just as spotlessly clean and well attended by uniformed staff.

We then took the metro back to our hotel, where we noticed ultra-clean marble floors, escalators at both ends of the station and train cars that were just like those in Beijing and Shanghai - very clean and quiet. In sharp contrast, they stood apart from the rickety, clattering subway trains at home in New York. We learned that similar metro systems now operate in more than 50 cities across China, unlike in the US,

where public transportation has largely been sidelined.

When we visited the ancient city of Kashi, we entered the Id Kah Mosque, one of the biggest in China. We observed crowds of people inside the mosque praying. We also noticed a plaque near the mosque's entrance, written in Uyghur, Chinese and English, stating that it was designated in 2001 as "a major historical and cultural site protected at the national level" by the National State Council, which provided large-scale funding for major maintenance and repair projects.

In the countryside outside Kashi, we found the cotton harvest in progress. We watched a big mechanical harvester moving through a multi-acre cotton field, "chewing up" the cotton and "spitting out" the bales. We also saw small crews of laborers trimming the cotton at the edges of these fields, working in groups of 10 or 12, with their scooters parked along the sides. We learned that these were day laborers, both Han and Uyghur, hired through a local temporary labor cooperative and paid on a piecework basis, according to the number of bags they picked. They typically earn between \$20 and \$40 a day - not a high wage but a reasonable one based on the local income level; however, it is a relatively minor part of an otherwise heavily mechanized harvest.

The US condemns Xinjiang cotton on the grounds of alleged forced labor, yet remains conspicuously silent about its own history of profiting from centuries of slavery in the cotton industry. In the mid-19th century, Western powers launched the Opium Wars, forcibly opening China to trade and ushering in a century of national humiliation. Today, some Western powers claim to care about human rights in China - yet the real concern seems to be China's self-driven success in agriculture and industry. Such selective criticism appears less about genuine concern and more about an attempt to stop China's rise.

So why has the US launched a slander campaign against Xinjiang? American politicians believe that "the US must remain the dominant force in the world." It's an ambitious goal, but unrealistic. In order to contain China's rise, the US initiated a trade war against China. However, they are now beginning to realize that it will hurt the US much more than China. The US still persists in its attempt to block Xinjiang from its role as a gateway for the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). But these efforts are futile. BRI trade and development through Central Asia is booming.

A growing number of people in the West are beginning to realize that the claims of so-called genocide or cultural eradication are unfounded. What I witnessed in Xinjiang will increasingly be seen by more visitors from the West - those who arrive with open minds and a genuine desire to see and judge for themselves. In fact, an increasing number of Westerners are responding to China's invitation to "come and see" firsthand. This opportunity is particularly appealing to college-age individuals, especially as the Chinese government has announced plans to invite 50,000 US students for study and exchange programs over the next five years. Environmental activists are scrambling to learn more about China's achievements in green development and its commitment to save the planet. Everyone who hears about the stunning success of China's targeted poverty alleviation campaign wants to learn more. Moreover, a decline in the standard of living across the US has stimulated widespread interest in the amazing positives to be found in China.

While some officials in Washington continue to denounce China as a "threat," ordinary people are beginning to see that China's official policy of building a community with a shared future can be a real solution to the ever-present threat of war.

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