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CHARMING XINJIANG

A BRIDGEHEAD IN EURASIA

MA YUAN



China Intercontinental Press

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Foreword

Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (hereinafter referred to as Xinjiang) is located in the Northwest of China with a borderline of more than 5,600 kilometers and an area of 1.6649 million square kilometers, which accounts for 1/6 of China's land area. Neighboring eight countries, Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India, it is an important passage on ancient Silk Road.

With thousands of years of history, Xinjiang has been a multi-ethnic and multi-religious region since ancient times. Since the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC to 25 AD), Xinjiang has been an inseparable part of this unitary multi-ethnic country of China.

As one of the five autonomous regions in China, Xinjiang now has 55 ethnic compositions, including Uygur, Han, Kazak, Hui, Kirgiz, Mongolia, Tajik, Xibe, Manchu, Uzbek, Russian, Daur, Tatar, etc. By the end of 2013, the total population of Xinjiang was about 22.643 million, among which the ethnic minority population accounts for about 61%.

Xinjiang, a charming place! Here are numerous scenic spots and historical sites, legendary history stories, splendid ethnic culture, impressive ethnic customs as well as diverse religious affiliation. Xinjiang, the heart of Eurasia! Here are unique natural conditions, a wide variety of terrain as well as majestic natural scenery. Xinjiang, an abundant place! Here are rich mineral resources, herds of cattle and sheep, grain

and cotton all over fields as well as seasonal fragrance of melon and fruit...

We publish the “Charming Xinjiang” Series to make this ancient, vibrant and modern place known by more readers at home and abroad. The Series include ten volumes and introduce Xinjiang in terms of ten aspects respectively. We hope this series can take you on a tour of “Charming Xinjiang”.

August 2014

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**A BRIDGEHEAD
IN EURASIA**

Preface



In March, there is still a chill in the air of early spring in Urumqi. Selleck, a travelling trader of Kazakhstan, has already come to the national second-class port in Light Industry Base in the Western Regions of Xinjiang to carry the purchased goods to the Consignment Department. These goods will appear on the markets of Astana and Almaty before the traditional Nowruz Festival of the Kazakhs on March 21. Selleck's forehead is covered with sweat. He records and quickly converts something on his mobile phone from time to time, argues with the vendor by his side changing some US dollars, and exhorts the workers who are packing and shipping the goods. However, the sweat is accompanied by delight on his face all the time. It seems that Selleck gains a lot this time. On this morning, travelling traders from countries surrounding Xinjiang are busy at all ports of Xinjiang like Selleck and shuttle on the trading road, with harvest from cultivation, joy and fatigue. For thousands of years, the charm of the Silk Road has always attracted many merchants from various regions to gather in Xinjiang which plays the role of a trade channel in both ancient and modern times and opens the window for cultural exchange.

After a busy day, Selleck asks several friends of different nationalities, including Han, Uygur, Kazakh, Hui, Xibe and Mongol, to get together in the Saiyiti Bar near the Urumqi Frontier Hotel at dusk. Selleck has been doing border trade for many years and he cannot succeed without the help of these friends. In days gone by, everyone is busy with their own business, but tonight they drink together for fun. As the get-together is rare, they are very excited, laughing and talking in Mandarin, Russian, Kazakh, Uygur and Mongol. Under the effect of alcohol, they forget about the boundaries between their countries and nationalities. They are business partners and also friends who trust each other.

This time, Selleck specially takes his wife, Gamary, with him to purchase goods in Urumqi and they will go to visit the Geographical Center of Asian Continent, 30 km away in the southwest of Urumqi. His wife used to teach geography in a middle school and has wanted to



Asia's Geographical Center Tower

see the “Asian Center” long since. Now their children have grown up and she has retired from work, so she came to visit Xinjiang with her husband.

The Geographical Center of Asian Continent was measured

and determined by experts from the Chinese Academy of Sciences based on the map of Asia with the Bonne projection technology in 1992. Located in the Baojiacaozi Village, Yongfeng Town, Urumqi of Xinjiang, it now has become a scenic spot. National flags and maps of 49 countries are standing erect around the Asian Center Square. On both sides of the Asian Center Avenue are famous sculptures from Asian countries - *Hunting the Lion* of Iran, *Condor* of Tajikistan, *Boat* of Kuwait, *Long Live the Peace* of Pakistan, *The Code of Hammurabi* of Iraq, and *Blessing* of Laos, etc. All of them symbolize the spiritual temperament of all Asian nationalities, show the cultural pursuit of people from each country, and reveal the coexistence of multi-civilizations.

In early spring, pieces of winter snow remain on open spaces around the Asian Center, and the little grass hates to be neglected and strives to be the first to come out from the ground, bringing some light green to the white field. The warm spring sun shines on the giant sculpture with spread wings. Gamary is lost in deep thought as she sees that soaring eagle, as if she went back to the historical scenes of ancient campaign with iron and bronze weapons, ethnic migration, the clan-tribe conquest, and the integration of ethnic groups to live and multiply.

The history of Kazakh is also the history of tribal mutual wars and fusion. The word “Kazakh” is derived from Turkic, which means free man and vagrant. Kazakh Khanate was founded in the latter half of the 15th century. As the main production mode of Kazakhs was grazing, so they took clan and tribe as their main production unit and gradually formed three groups during the nomadic process - Great жүз (Senior жүз), Orta жүз (Middle жүз), and Alshyn жүз (Junior жүз).

With the building of modern countries, the Kazakhs have been divided into different countries in Central Asia, with continuous family affection in the geographical relationship across mountains and rivers. For instance, Gamary has a distant cousin living in Altay Prefecture of



Asian Center Peace Square

Xinjiang. As transportation becomes increasingly convenient, the two families visit each other more frequently.

At present, cross-border ethnic groups in Xinjiang and Central Asia have their own geographical attributes, but ties of consanguinity between Xinjiang and surrounding countries cannot be cut off. Since ancient times, Xinjiang and its surrounding areas have always been a whole, both in religious belief, manners and customs, and races. All ethnic groups multiplied, beat on the battle, and blended on this land; some tribes died out in the long process of history, while others absorbed and accepted other tribes and formed new nationalities by means of occupation, intermarriage, trade, etc. The history of Xinjiang and its surrounding areas is a history of war, national fusion and trade development.

The long Silk Road connected the Eastern and Western cultures and the drawn-out sound from camel rings brought merchants from the East and the West to meet and part here. As Xinjiang is in the hinterland of the Eurasian continent, it was a hub of transportation

of the ancient Silk Road, joining the Eastern and Western cultures. Xinjiang is also the passageway of ethnic migration, blending diverse cultures and inheriting various religions. Xinjiang, bordering on eight countries, which includes Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, is the geographical center of Asia among the eight neighboring countries on the west.

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Spring of Xinjiang for Opening to the Outside World



In the 1960s and 1970s, Selleck lost touch with his distant relatives in Burqin County, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture in Xinjiang, owing to historical reasons, and they could only miss each other silently in their heart. Sometimes, Selleck looked at the high Ili Mountain and worried about his cousins, uncle and aunt, wondering if they were doing well. This was a torture for Selleck.

Stepping Out for Opening to the West

It was in a spring with sudden coldness after the weather got warmer when an old man put forward the idea of reform and opening-up. Xinjiang, at the far border of China, bathed in the spring breeze of reform and opening-up, was changing quietly. In this year, Selleck



Autumn scenery of Hemu Village, Burqin County

graduated from university and successfully found a job in a state-owned factory in Almaty. Then he fell in love with Gamary from a lower grade and eventually married her. When he heard of the news of China's reform and opening-up, he tried to get in touch with his relatives in Xinjiang by letter. In 1979, Sino-Soviet relations were gradually normalized and Selleck got closer to his wish to come to Xinjiang to visit his relatives and friends.

At that time, three cities and counties in Xinjiang, including Urumqi, Shihezi and Turpan, have taken the lead in opening up, opening a new chapter in Xinjiang's external exchange. In 1980, Tianshan Wool Textile Co., Ltd., the first Sino-foreign joint venture in Xinjiang, was established. This was a successful case of introduction of foreign capital in Xinjiang. Horgos Port at the border between China and the Soviet Union restored opening to the Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan and the third countries after getting approval from the Chinese Government on November 16, 1983. Khunjerab Pass at the border in Xinjiang between China and Pakistan resumed its barter trade in 1978. And in 1986, the Government of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region made the decision of "opening up comprehensively and giving policy support to the west". In 1988, by issuing the *Minutes on the Openness of Xinjiang*, the Chinese Government extended the preferential policy which had been only limited in Urumqi, Yining, Shihezi and Kashgar, stating that goods and materials imported by foreign-funded enterprises were exempt from custom duties, to several other cities, including Aksu, Korla, Turpan, Kumul, etc.; Xinjiang was given the rights for examining and approving economic institutions stationed abroad; and Horgos Port was approved to be opened to the third countries. In the same year, the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation authorized Xinjiang to approve foreign-funded companies in Ili, Tacheng, Altay, Changji and Kashgar, to enjoy the right of barter trade operation at the places where China borders on the former Soviet Union and Mongolia. The opening of the

ports provided a window for Xinjiang products to enter Kazakhstan. At Horgos Port, border trade was the most popular mode of trade then. Through barter trade, each took what he needed. On the port market, residents from the Soviet Union exchanged civil and military telescopes, lighters and other articles for white granulated sugar and textile products made in Xinjiang.

Selleck resumed contact with his relatives, who had been out of touch for many years, by letters. Pushed by the policy of the reform of economic system, Doman, a young male cousin of Selleck, contracted dozens of *mu* (a unit of area) of grasslands which belonged to collective property originally and got the share of dozens of sheep and horses. After his production enthusiasm was aroused, Doman worked from dawn to night to breed his domestic animals and grazed all the year round from summer pasture to winter pasture. He thought to himself, "I can live a better life as long as I work hard to breed more domestic animals."

In 1989, the Government of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region formulated another policy of "opening up comprehensively, giving policy support to the west, leading domestic enterprises and connecting and cooperating with foreign enterprises, establishing contact with hinterland and exporting products to areas in the west of Xinjiang". In 1989, the Chinese Government approved 13 more cities to be opened to the outside world, including Yining City and Bole City, etc., leading to 25 open cities and counties in Xinjiang in total. Approved by the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC), Xinjiang local trade import and export corporations enjoyed the operation right for direct economic trade with former German Democratic Republic, Poland, Hungary, former Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, and Mongolia, etc.

During the 10 years after starting work, Selleck not only found the one that he loved, but also had children. His son and daughter were born successively, bringing vitality and hope to this traditional Kazakh