

The Silk Road

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"The Bridge between Eastern and Western Cultures"

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In This Issue

- Xinjiang: China's Pre- and Post-Modern Crossroad
- Uyghur Art Music and Chinese Silk Roadism
- Polychrome Rock Paintings in the Altay Mountains
- Viticulture and Viniculture in the Turfan Region
- Annotated Bibliography of Xinjiang and Adjoining Regions
- Bactrian Camels and Bactrian-Dromedary Hybrids
- The Khataynameh of Ali Akbar

Next Issue

- Connie Chin on Buddhist sites along the Silk Road
- Susan Whitfield on the International Dunhuang Project
- Terence Clark on hunting hounds in Eurasia
- Ralph Kauz on trade across Eurasia
- and contributions by Jonathan Bloom, Sheila Blair and others

About

The Silk Road is a semi-annual publication of the Silkroad Foundation. *The Silk Road* can also be viewed on-line at <<http://www.silkroadfoundation.org>>.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions or contributions. Guidelines for contributors may be found in Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 2004) on the website.

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From the Editor

Xinjiang, the focus of several contributions to this issue, hardly needs to be introduced to readers of *The Silk Road*. While the designation Xinjiang is a modern one, the territory occupied by today's Xinjiang-Uighur Autonomous Region in China embraces the earliest history of exchange in and across Inner Asia. That framing of the region as an administrative unit has to be considered rather artificial though in view of its vast size and its geographic and ethnic diversity. Whatever the modern political myths and realities, Xinjiang was never really a unified territory historically. In the *longue durée* Chinese control of the region occupies a relatively small part of its history. It was even more rarely the center of an independent state with any longevity. The history is often one of attempting to control some portion of the region from its periphery — from just beyond its eastern edge at Dunhuang, or north of the mountains in Urumqi, or at its far western end at Kashgar. Not infrequently the political and cultural centers of importance for the region were beyond the Kunlun and Karakorum Mountains or over the passes in Ferghana.

When studying the Silk Road (or any other history which begins in centuries so far removed from our own), we need continually to ask to what degree we should begin in the present. The famous Belgian medievalist Henri Pirenne, on arriving in Stockholm for a conference, set out with another famous medievalist Marc Bloch to

explore the city. As Bloch tells it, when he asked his companion where they should begin, Pirenne responded, "If I were an antiquarian, I would have eyes only for old stuff, but I am a historian. Therefore, I love life." Bloch then adds, "This faculty of understanding the living is, in very truth, the master quality of the historian." [*The Historian's Craft*, 1953 ed., p. 43]

It is appropriate then that the first of our contributions to this issue is Dru Gladney's impressive overview of a broad span of Xinjiang's history, bringing the story down to the "post-modern" present. Gladney is one of the leading authorities on the ethnic diversity of the region and is singularly well informed about the challenges of the present and the region's future. Whether modernizing policies of promoting cultural integration will ultimately suppress the historic divisions within the region remains to be seen. It is clear that Chinese perceptions of Xinjiang's strategic and economic importance today will ensure a continuing focus on the region. Yet it is useful to remember that while this latest phase of Chinese rule in Xinjiang is now about two-and-a-half centuries old, during that period large sections of the region were often quite independent of the central Government. The present lives in the shadow of the experience of the Han and T'ang dynasties, which ultimately had to abandon any pretense of control in the region.

Our second contributor, James Millward, has written the best study of the Qing Dynasty's

implementation of its rule there. In his essay here he turns to a different topic: how music has been used politically in constructing and interpreting identities. As students of the Silk Road know, the popularity of musicians and other entertainers from the oases of the Tarim Basin and places further west is one of the striking proofs of the transnational cultural exchange in T'ang times. Even then though, their foreignness raised the hackles of those who saw a threat to Chinese values. The issues today involving music are somewhat different, since there are political dangers in promoting national cultures simultaneously with artificially denying the transnational nature of that musical heritage. Those familiar with the substantial literature on Soviet nationality policies are well aware of how the government's "affirmative action" policies backfired in creating the conditions for the emergence of independent states.

We continue here our practice of providing bibliographic resources for further study. Nathan Light's magnificent bibliography will help considerably those who wish to read more in the latest literature on Xinjiang. I can also recommend his website as one of the richest collections of materials and links on the region and in particular on the Uyghurs and their culture.

Our other contributions cover a diversity of material. Wang Binghua is one of the most distinguished contributors to the continuing archaeological investigation of Xinjiang. His essay on the little known rock paintings in northern Xinjiang provides the

basis for tantalizing hypotheses about pre-historic culture. We expect to feature a recent interview with him in an upcoming issue. Xinru Liu is known to all students of the Silk Road for her books integrating the study of religion and material culture. Here she explores a topic connected with the fame of Turpan as a center of viniculture. Dan Potts' essay on the Bactrian camel comes from a lecture he gave at Stanford for the Silkroad Foundation's series. He clarifies issues regarding the evidence concerning Bactrian camels in areas of the Middle East which were not part of the animal's indigenous range. Ralph Kauz will be lecturing at Columbia this autumn in a new series sponsored by the Foundation. His research report on his translation of a little known Persian source for Inner Asian history reminds us, as does Wang Binghua's piece, that just when we thought we were beginning to gain control over the primary sources, others are being brought to our attention.

This issue of *The Silk Road* comes at an important moment in my personal acquaintance with Xinjiang, since for the first time this summer, thanks to arrangements made by Adela

Lee, the head of the Silkroad Foundation and Wang Binghua, I will have a chance to visit Urumqi, see the famous Tarim mummies and explore in the Kazakh and Mongol areas north of the Tien Shan.

On my return I hope to finish work on precisely the kind of modern topic which proves to be enlightening about the earlier history of the Silk Roads. The focus is the writings of C. P. Skrine, the British consul in Kashgar in 1922-24, whose book on *Chinese Central Asia* is still a very valuable source of information. Skrine's unpublished writings and his official reports supplement what the book reveals about the transnational connectedness of Xinjiang and the continuation of historic trade patterns. In Skrine's time the camel caravans of the Silk Road era were still the transport of choice, even if then they might be loaded with oil from Baku on the Caspian Sea.

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adapted from: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/china_rel96.jpg
The location of Xinjiang (for details from satellite images, see pp. 16 and 27.