



Chinese Turkestan: A Photographic Journey Through an Ancient Civilization

Ryan Pyle

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Sparsely populated and spanning over 1.6 million square kilometres of desert, river basins, mountains, and grasslands, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region has had a turbulent history. Many of the events that have occurred there during the last 2500 years have been inextricably associated with its geographical position in north-west China, at a crossroads linking Europe and Asia. Traversed by branches of the series of trade routes that formed the ancient Silk Road, the region has been fought over and controlled by a succession of warlords and empires. With the most recent influx of Han Chinese have also come transformations in the character of Xinjiangs cities: shopping malls now replace ancient bazaars, and new apartment blocks rise above what remains of the old laneways. In reality, the people of Xinjiang are facing many changes. Their future, as well as the future of this culturally and geographically unique territory, may depend on how those changes are dealt with. Despite the contentious issues that exist in Xinjiang, it was not for any political reasons that I chose to call this book Chinese Turkestan. It was simply because, for me, the old name conjures up a region without physical borders; an admixture of an idea rather than a distinct geographical or political entity.

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