



Core units: Exemplars – Year 8  
Illustration 4: Migration within China

## Xinjiang

In this file you are presented with photographs of Xinjiang province in western China. This is a place which has often been in the news in Australia due to ethnic conflict. Xinjiang is surrounded by desert and mountains. For centuries this has kept its people isolated and secure. Today, with modern transport, their isolation is at an end.

Whereas the east of China is almost entirely settled by one ethnic group (the Han) this is not the case in the west. Xinjiang has been home for thousands of years to the Uyghur people. They jealously preserve their own language, alphabet, customs and beliefs. Unlike most Han, they are predominantly Muslim. They have a close association with farming and have resisted efforts to make them more industrialised.

Scared that the Uyghur people would want to break away from China and form their own nation or join with their neighbours, the central government introduced a policy of migration to encourage Han settlement in Xinjiang. The result has been a massive migration which has threatened Uyghur culture as it is faced with an increasing Han presence. This is an example of migration being used as a political weapon.

Also present in Xinjiang are some of the world's last nomads. The Kazakh have undertaken their annual migration through the mountains for centuries. They have herded yaks, camels and sheep through the rugged mountains. Constant movement resulted in poor education and few skills beyond herding. They are now under pressure to settle down but are viewed with suspicion by both the Uyghur and Han. They are caught between a migratory lifestyle which is almost over and moving to cities where they have no skills to offer.

As you look at this file think about the inquiry questions that are provided, and be prepared to discuss them in your group.



**Arid mountains**

1

Source: Photograph © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.

1



2

**Inhospitable desert**

This is now the source of natural gas and oil which supports the Chinese economy.



3

**Heavenly Lake is one of the most attractive alpine areas in Xinjiang**

Until recently, when nomadism was banned, it was the summer home of migrating Kazakh herders.

Source: All photographs © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.

**Inquiry question**

- What natural features would have prevented large-scale migration before modern transport?

4



#### Xinjiang street signs are commonly in two languages

You can see here both standard Chinese and distinctive Uyghur characters which trace their origin to the Middle East.

Source: Photograph © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.

While Chinese language is now taught to all students, many Uyghur are not fluent. Radio stations broadcast in both languages and television programs are commonly 'dubbed'. Attempts by the government to reduce the influence of Uyghur are fiercely opposed. Most Uyghur are Muslim and the mosque remains a focal point for ethnic pride.

#### Inquiry questions

- It is a common view that migrants to Australia should become fluent in English. What do you feel should happen in Xinjiang?
- Should the Han learn Uyghur to fit in with their new home?
- Should the Uyghur learn Han so they can better participate in China outside of Xinjiang?
- Given that classrooms are mixed, which language should be spoken there?



5

**Uyghur cities traditionally used a style of architecture which is not found elsewhere in China**

New building regulations that demand more strength for buildings in earthquake-prone Xinjiang have made it harder to build in traditional styles which for centuries have used mud bricks. The changing city face of Kashgar means that few buildings in the 'old city' will be kept. The loss of such an architectural heritage is blamed on Han migration.



6

**Some attempts have been made to reflect traditional architectural styles in Kashgar**

The old city was famous for its narrow, intimate streets which were always in deep shadow and provided relief from the heat. They are largely gone.

Source: All photographs © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.





7

**Even shopping centres are being torn down and rebuilt in modern styles**

They have an appearance but not the feel of authentic Uyghur architecture.



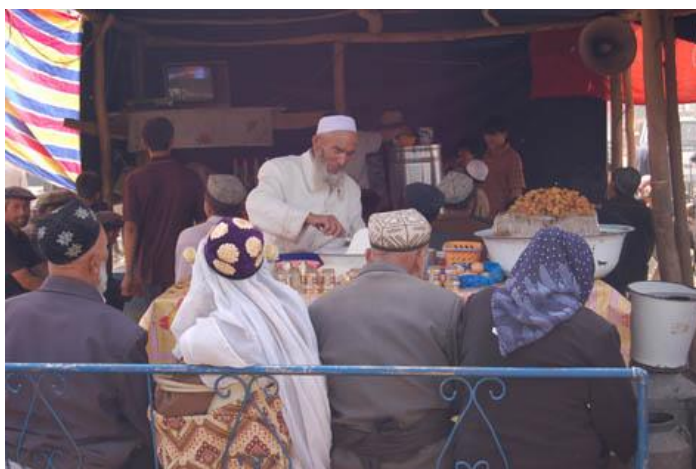
8

**The broad main streets of modern Kashgar are now full of buses and cars**

Fewer Uyghur people own private transport than Han. Their traditional mode of transport, donkey cart, is jokingly called the 'Kashgar mercedes'. Broad streets also make it easier for police to move through the city and more difficult for protesters to gather.

**Inquiry question**

- What can you see in the photographs 5–8 which indicate the success of the government plans for Han migration?



9

**A street vendor carving ice to place in drinks at the bazaar in Kashgar**

Uyghur men and women wear clothes which make them stand out from the Han migrants. It is a form of dress which they have used for centuries, and is more common in neighbouring countries than in the rest of China.

Source: All photographs © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.



10

**At the Kashgar animal market**

Even young Uyghur keep their traditional dress, and while they aspire to owning a car like their Han neighbours, for many, a donkey is the most realistic option.



11

**The central bazaar is the major shopping centre for Uyghur women**

Note the use of headscarves by all the women.



12

**Continuing Han migration means that these urban Uyghur children will have to face difficult choices**

Source: All photographs © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.

**Inquiry question**

Can these Uyghur children pass their culture onto their own children or will Xinjiang become a foreign land for them?



13

**Kazakh yurts at Lake Karakuri in the shadow of Mount Maztagata**



14

**One yurt per family**

Made from layers of felt, yurts are roomy, easy to transport and very warm. However, if you live a nomadic existence there are no schools, doctors, electricity, plumbing, Internet or even television. It is also very difficult to learn skills which can get you a job elsewhere.

Source: All photographs © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.

**Inquiry question**

- What makes this environment suitable for herding camels, yaks and sheep?
- Why is nomadism a sensible response to this environment?
- Could you cope with this lifestyle?





15

**In an attempt to stop the annual migration of the Kazakhs, the government has built permanent yurts from concrete**

They have basic septic tanks and running water. They are seldom used.



16

**Life is changing for the Kazakhs**

In the past Kazakh nomads migrated with large herds of animals through the mountain passes. Today they are restricted to small pastures for which they must get authority in advance. Their entire lives have been dedicated to herding animals. They have not had the opportunity to learn more skills.



17

**Motorbikes are replacing horses for herding**

Bikes need fuel and spare parts so the Kazakh are being enticed into a cash economy. No longer can they remain self-sufficient. The government policy of preventing their annual migration has changed their lifestyle.

Source: All photographs © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.





18

**What is the future for the nomads?**

Source: All photographs © Malcolm Massie, Scotch College Adelaide.