

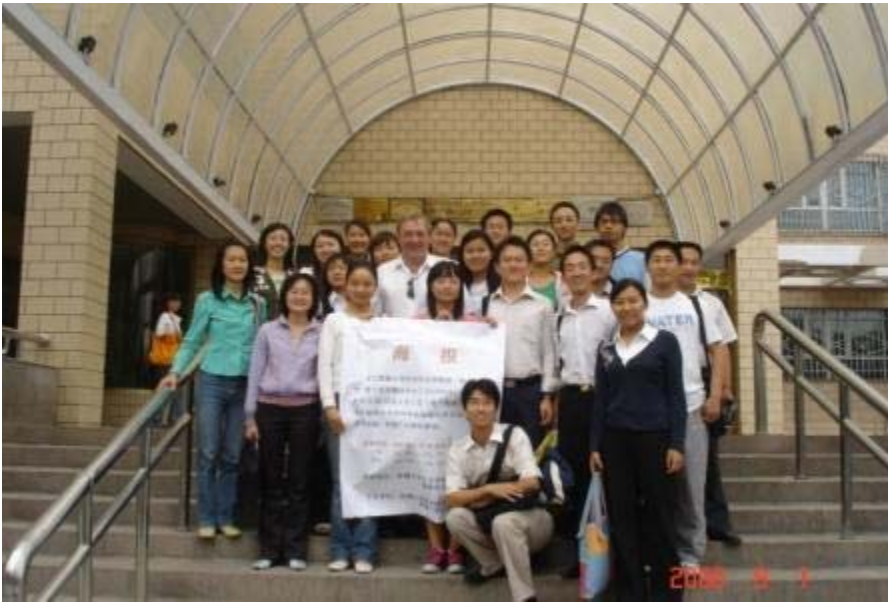
Visit XinJiang University 28 August-2 September 2006

Richard T. Griffiths

Urumqi is the capital of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, near the border with Kazakhstan and Mongolia – well, relatively near. It is an ethnically mixed city of over 2 million inhabitants and it boasts a modern university campus. It is also one of our partners in the *Silk Road Combined Centre of EU Studies* and that is why I went to a remote city that few people outside China seem to have heard of, far less visited.



I gave an intensive course on the early history of the European Union which was regularly attended by about 25 students, with another 10-15 casual attenders. Although they had had little background, there was great interest in the EU and its future relations with China, and many students wished to study the subject further. This, of course, is what our involvement with the Centre is designed to facilitate, by training future staff and by further academic cooperation.



But enough of that, what were my impressions?

It was surprisingly (for me, at least) modern. Its regional income is a little higher than the country's average, which (adjusted) is around that of Turkey, and a little less than Thailand, both of which I know quite well.

It was very un-Chinese (well, the 'minorities' do constitute 50% of the local population). It is probably politically incorrect to say, but its street scene reminded me a lot of Turkey with its oven baked bread, its markets, its mosques, its music and its lamb kebabs cooked over charcoal fires in the streets.



It had some fabulous scenery. Mountains on one side, and desert on the other, I enjoyed the (little) free time I had for exploring.



And. Last but not least, I got on Chinese TV (OK, only a local station, but I was only there for a week!)

