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On the Wings of Modernization

China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region marks the 70th anniversary of its foundation

By Yuan Yuan

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The train, running at a speed of up to 250 km per hour, was the first high-speed train in the region and it reduced the rail journey time between the two places from over one hour to 40 minutes.

The rail link is part of a longer line which in 2018 will extend eastward to Zhangjiakou, the co-host city of the 2022 Winter Olympics, in Hebei Province.

Ethnic autonomy

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of the Region's foundation.

From April 23 to May 3 in 1947, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), a people's congress was held in Ulanhot of Inner Mongolia, and May 1 was set as the date for the region's foundation.

Inner Mongolia was the first provincial-level ethnic autonomous region to be established in China. The aim was to create equality, solidarity and common prosperity for all ethnic groups, and regional ethnic autonomy was also subsequently implemented in Xinjiang, Tibet, Ningxia and Guangxi.

Inner Mongolia has 55 ethnic groups and a total population of about 25 million people, of whom one fifth are ethnic Mongolians. The autonomous region occupies 12 percent of China's land, lies adjacent to eight other provin-

cial regions and borders Russia and Mongolia to the north.

"The successful example set by Inner Mongolia proves that regional ethnic autonomy is the choice suitable for China," said Yu Zhengsheng, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, at the ceremony marking the 70th anniversary held in Hohhot on August 8.

"The system is a base for a harmonious society and other ethnic policies of our country. Based on the premise of following national unity, it can handle special issues of ethnic regions, like protection of local cultures," Yu added.

"The implementation of the policy of regional ethnic autonomy is a great achievement



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of the CPC," Mu Ren, a professor of ethnology at Inner Mongolia Normal University, told Xinhua News Agency. "The system shows respect for history and is based on reality."

Inner Mongolia, in the past seven decades, has developed in various areas and made great achievements. Figures from the government of Inner Mongolia show that the region's economy has expanded from 537 million yuan (\$76 million) in 1947 to 1.863 trillion yuan (\$266.2 billion) in 2016. It now ranks first among the economies of the nation's five autonomous regions.

Green grassland

Many people think of Inner Mongolia as a vast grassland dotted with snow-white yurts and galloping horses.

This is not the full picture of the autonomous region, at least for Yin Yuzhen, a Shaanxi local who has been living in Inner Mongolia for more than 30 years. Her experience in the region is just the opposite: a vast expansion of desert as well as the desperation and isolation of living in it.

Yin moved to Inner Mongolia after she married Bai Wanxiang, a local of the region, in 1985. Before that, Yin never thought she would live in a desert for three decades.

The Mu Us Desert, where Bai lives, was nothing but endless sand, where sandstorms were the typical weather 30 years ago. The couple lived in an isolated place with no neighbors and even no passersby.

"Sand storms could last more than 40 days in those days," Yin told Xinhua News Agency. "I could not see anybody around except for my husband. We were the only couple living there."

The harsh conditions were beyond her imagination, and they forced her to make changes. She decided to plant trees in the des-

ert and soon managed to make this crazy idea a reality in 1986, just one year after she moved to the region. "Trees for me were the only hope, even though it was quite dim," she said.

She got the support of her husband. The couple spent their savings and bought 600 saplings, among which only about 100 survived in the end. Yin saw hope in the surviving trees and was optimistic for the long-term battle with the desert.

They finally found out the way to solidify tree roots in the sand. In the past 32 years, trees planted by them have covered an area of more than 70,000 *mu* (4,667 hectares), and many people have followed up to create a green land on the isolated desert.

Elion Resources Group Ltd., a company founded in 1988 in Inner Mongolia with the aim of ecological restoration and new energy exploration, has also spent decades tackling desertification and has made remarkable progress in Hobq Desert in Ordos of Inner Mongolia.

The staff of the company started to plant trees in Hobq in 1988. Now, rows of willow trees have taken root in the desert, forming a fence that prevents the spread of sand storms.

In the past 29 years, the area of desertification eliminated by Elion has reached 10,000 square km, and another 6,000 square km have been transformed into regular land.

"Now the sandy weather in Hobq has decreased by 95 percent, and more than 100,000 locals have been lifted out of poverty," Wang Wenbiao, President of Elion, told *China Land and Resources News*. "Compared with 1988, the rainfall here has increased six-fold."

They have also adopted advanced technologies to make construction materials out of sand. Their successful experience has gained attention of neighboring countries of China, especially those with similar problems.

"Two thirds of our nation's land is in western

areas, and one third of the western areas is covered with desert, in which one third of the poor population of the country lives," Wang said. "Desertification is not just a project for ecological restoration; it can also help people in poverty get a better life."

During a visit to Inner Mongolia in 2014, President Xi Jinping pointed out two methods for ecological protection. First, major ecological restoration projects such as sandstorm source control programs and return of marginal farmland to forest and grazing land to grassland. Second, the speeding up of institution building related to ecological protection.

Since then, Inner Mongolia's ecological protection has been on a fast track, with more efforts in desert control, grassland protection and water and soil preservation. Since 2011, the state has provided subsidies for ecological protection, which had amounted to 30 billion yuan (\$4.29 billion) by 2016.

Now, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has 182 nature reserves and 43 national forest parks.

The resources

Even though high-speed express trains arrived relatively late in Inner Mongolia compared with other places in China, one third of the rails for bullet trains in China is produced in the region by Baotou Iron and Steel Group, one of the leading iron and steel producers in China.

Inner Mongolia is rich in resources, which the region heavily relied on in the past to develop its economy. It has the world's largest rare earth mining area. It is the major power supplier for China's west-to-east and north-to-south power transmission programs. It is a major supplier of natural gas for China's west-to-east gas transmission program. In 2016, a quarter of China's coal, 850 million tons, was produced in the region. Once, almost 60 percent of industry



Yin Yuzhen works with her husband on farmland in 2014



Students at Hohhot Minzu College learn how to paint on lambskin, a unique artistic skill in Inner Mongolia, on September 29, 2014



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in Ordos related to coal. Meanwhile, the region is China's biggest domestic dairy product supplier, producing 7.3 million tons of milk last year. It also has the largest output of mutton, fine wool and cashmere wool in the country.

During a visit to the area in 2014, President Xi stressed the importance of economic restructuring and put forward a series of solutions.

Xi said the region should combine adjustment of development mode with optimizing the industrial structure, and the adjustment should also be combined with energy saving and emission reduction.

Inner Mongolia has since made significant progress in industrial restructuring. The proportion of coal-related industries dropped to 22 percent in 2016, compared with 34 percent in 2011.

Now, the over-reliance on natural resources for development in Inner Mongolia has changed, and various alternative industries have boomed in recent years. Tourism, increasing annually by over 20 percent on average, has made the economy grow by an average of 7.9 percent each year from 2013 to 2016.

The development and construction of new energy industries in the region have been speeded up. The region has the largest integrated wind power grid in China, its installed wind power capacity has reached 26.1 million kw, and its installed solar power capacity stands at 6.9 million kw, according to *China Electric Power News*.

With the double advantage of low-priced electricity supplies and a cool climate which is conducive to operating IT servers, the region is actively developing big data and cloud computing industry and has set a goal of building the largest data center in north China.

More than 3 million servers are expected to be put into use in the region over the next three to five years. "The output of the region's big data industry is expected to surpass 100 billion yuan (\$15 billion) by 2020," said Bu Xiaolin, Chairwoman of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Big data has been applied locally in many areas. A Mongolian language database, containing over 19 million words and phrases, has been developed in an effort to protect the ethnic culture and language.

The database, which includes a dictionary for scientific terminology featuring Mandarin, Mongolian, English and Japanese, covers a wide range of content including lexicons, grammar and literature.

Mongolians were traditionally referred to as "people who live on horseback" since they led a semi-nomadic pastoral lifestyle on grasslands. Now, modern technologies have also been adopted in many industries including livestock farming.

Many animals have been fitted with GPS collars to enable herdsmen to accurately locate them via computers or smartphones. Watering systems, which automatically maintain a certain level of water to ensure adequate supply for herds, have also been adopted in many areas in the region.

Since 2012, a total of 1.41 million people have been lifted out of poverty, and basic medical insurance now covers 98 percent of the combined urban and rural population. Inner Mongolia's urbanization rate has surpassed 60 percent.

The passageway

Manzhouli, located at the eastern junction of the borders between China, Russia and Mongolia, which has a population of 300,000, is a century-old inland port city known as the "window of East Asia" in Inner Mongolia. It witnessed the boom of the early Chinese gold miners in Russia in the 1980s. Recently, it has been undergoing robust development, especially since the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed in 2013.

The China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC), initiated in September 2014 during the first trilateral meeting of the heads of state of the three nations in Tajikistan, became the first multilateral cooperation plan to become part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Xu Xuemeng, a logistics monitor with Manzhouli Customs, revealed during an interview with Xinhua that more hi-tech products are being delivered to Europe, including computers, home appliances and manufacturing equipment.

Now, Manzhouli is linked to 28 international destinations with freight trains, and nearly 70 percent of trade between China and Russia passes through the port. In the first seven months of this year, 747 freight trains passed through Manzhouli carrying goods worth \$3.15 billion, 25 percent more than those transhipped in the same period last year.

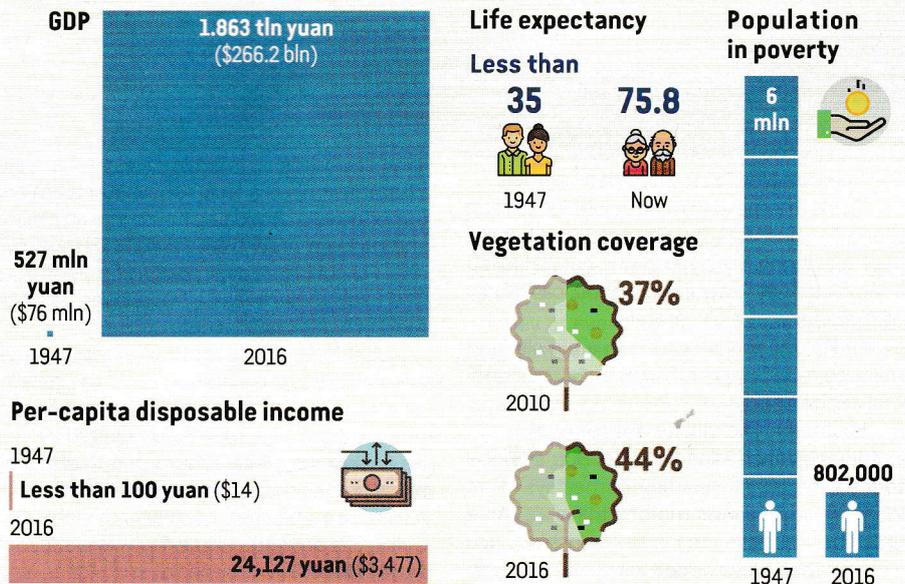
Figures from the local government show that the foreign trade volume of Inner Mongolia has increased from 30 million yuan (\$4.28 million) to 77.3 billion yuan (\$11.1 billion) since the beginning of China's reform and opening up in the late 1970s.

"We are integrating our plans with the Belt and Road development. We are of crucial importance to the northward opening up of Inner Mongolia," Mayor of Manzhouli Xu Ailian told Xinhua. "In the future, we will conduct more practical cooperation with Mongolia and Russia to invigorate the grass-land Silk Road." ■



A worker of Yili Group checks an automatic production line of liquid milk on July 27

Achievements in the Past 70 Years



(Source: People's Daily; designed by Pamela Tobey)

Copiedited by Chris Surtees
Comments to yuan yuan@bjreview.com

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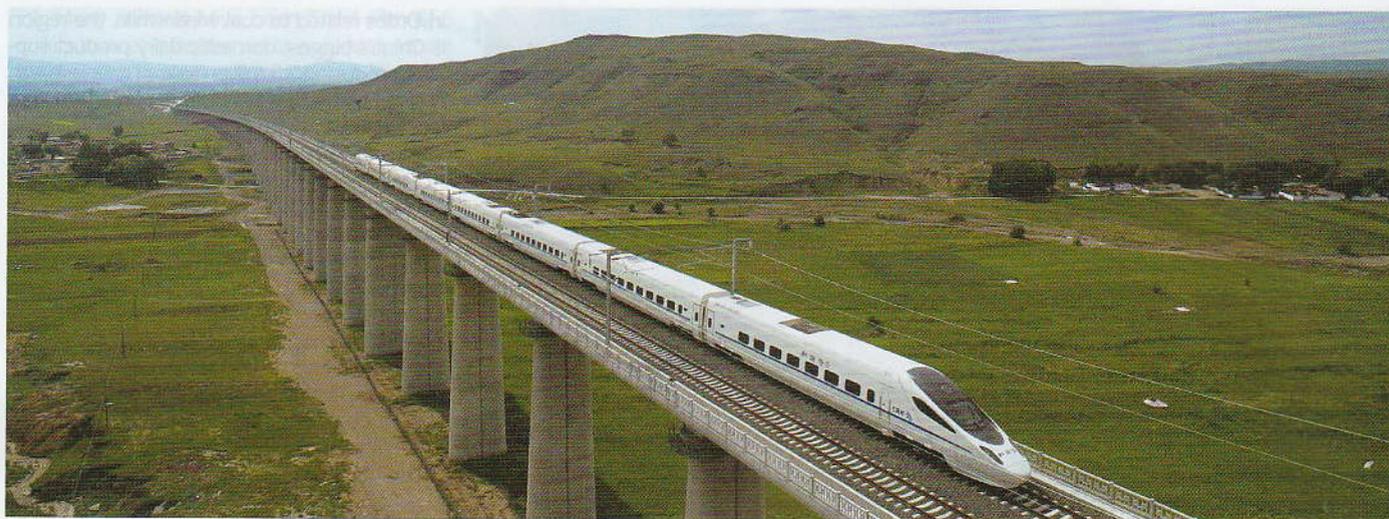
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