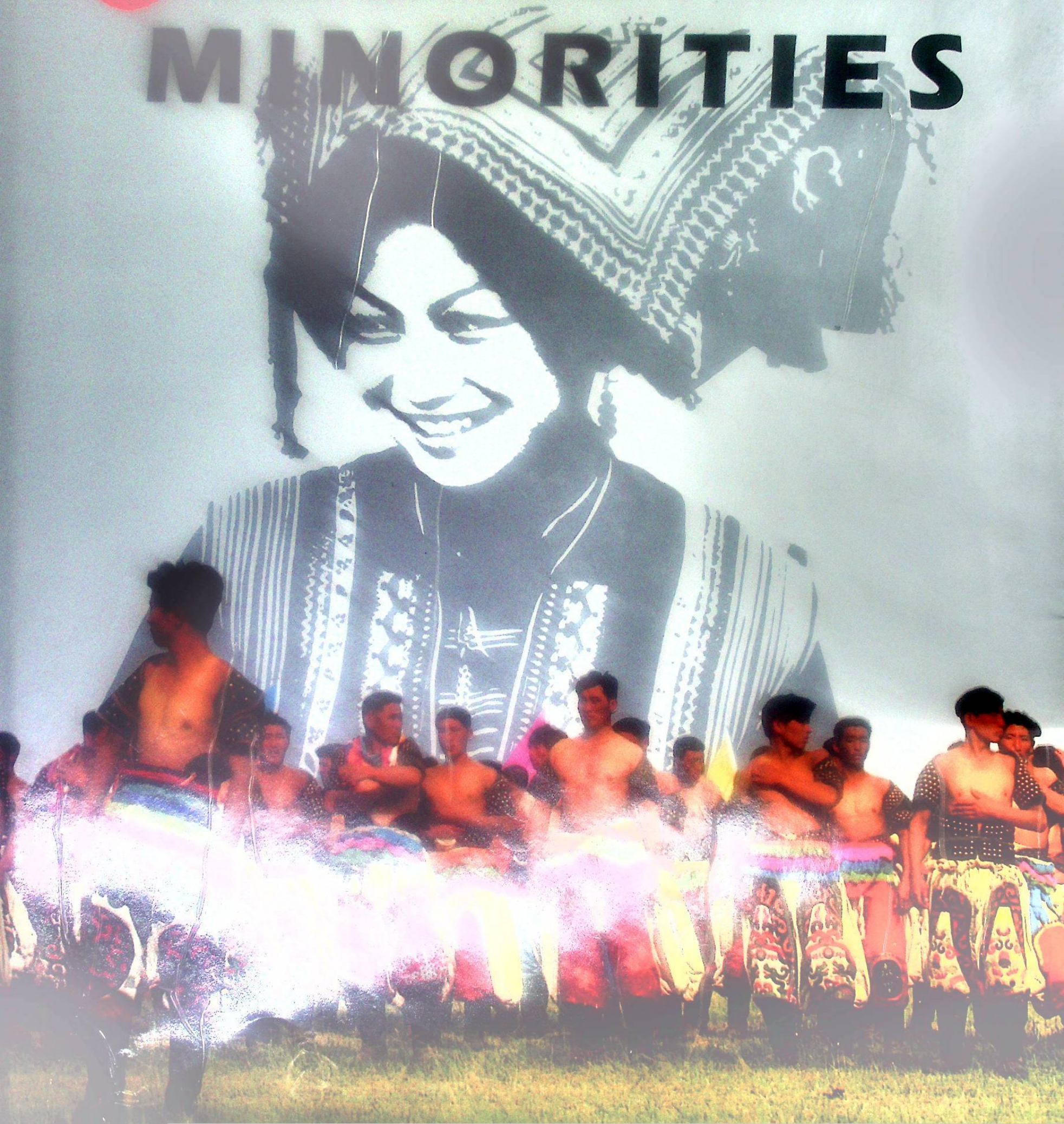


L I F E S T Y L E S O F

C H I N A ' S E T H N I C M I N O R I T I E S



LIFE STYLES OF
**CHINA'S ETHNIC
MINORITIES**



L I F E S T Y L E S O F
**C H I N A ' S E T H N I C
M I N O R I T I E S**

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The Uygurs

– Descents of the “Dingling Nomads of High Wheels”

The Uygurs are the principal ethnic group living in Xinjiang. Numbering over 5,950,000, they make up three-fifths of Xinjiang's total population. Most of them are congregated in the area south of the Tianshan Mountains. There are also scattered Uygur communities in the Ili area and northern Xinjiang.

The ancestry of the Uygurs can be traced back to the Dingling nomads in north and northwestern China in the third century. The Dingling nomads were called Tiele or Chilie in the fourth century. Because they drove carts of high wheels, they were also known as High Wheels or Dingling Nomads of High Wheels. History books of the Han people written in later periods call them Huihe or Ouigurs. Natural calamities and wars at the end of the ninth century forced the ancestors of the Uygurs to migrate to other areas along three routes. One group of them moved to the area around Turpan and Hami, where they founded the Gaochang Ouigur regime. Over the long years that followed, they mixed with the natives of the area and the Tufans, Kitans and Mongolians who came later, and gradually formed the Uygur nationality. Uygur, meaning “unity” and “alliance,” is the name they took in 1934.

The Uygurs use their own spoken and written language. Their long history has yielded a brilliant culture. Among their precious cultural heritages are the musical masterpiece *Twelve Mukam*, the epic poem *Kutadolu Biliq* (*Blessings and Wisdom*), *The Great Turkic Dictionary* and the popular *Tales of Afandi*, which are known throughout China.



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110. A Uygur bride is being dressed up for the wedding.
 111. According to Uygur tradition, when the bride leaves her parents she is placed on a red rug by her father or brother and carried to the front door and a carriage or horse by young men from the bride-fetching party.
 112. A bride-fetching procession.



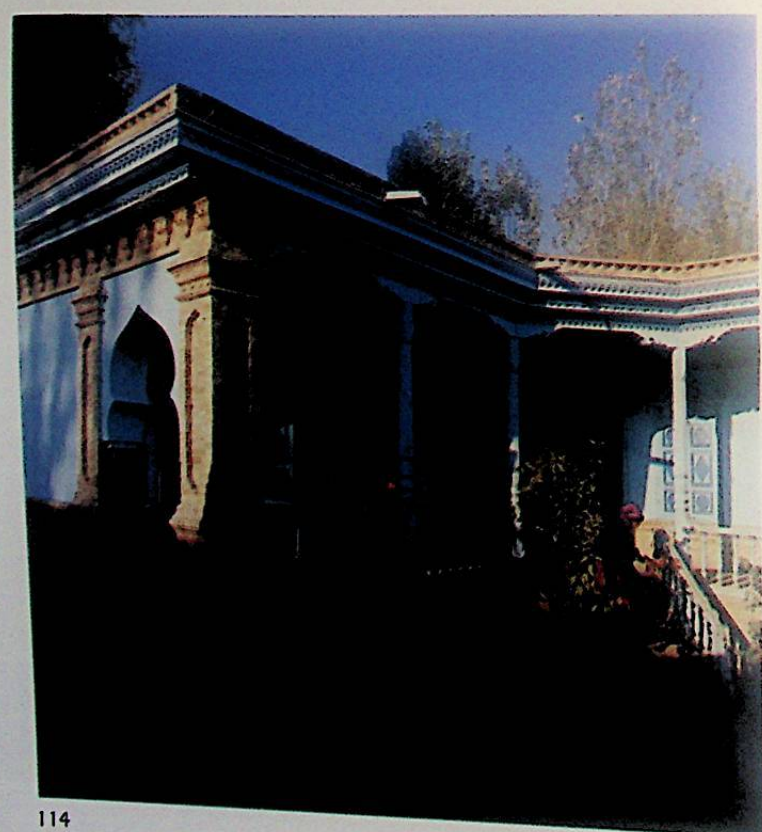
- 113. A Uygur village surrounded by brown hills. The domed building is the village's mosque. Of the ten ethnic groups in China who are followers of Islam, the Uygurs have the largest number of mosques in relation to their population. There is a mosque in each street and village providing prayer services on ordinary days. There are also larger mosques where believers from several villages or streets go on Friday. Some mosques are built on remote roadside for passers-by to read prayers.
- 114. Most of the Uygur houses in southern Xinjiang are built with a courtyard and deep colonnade. The courtyard is planted with flowers and kept tidy and clean to provide a quiet and pleasant environment to live in.
- 115. An old street built in exotic style in Kashgar. The city of Kashgar in the western part of southern Xinjiang was an important stop on the ancient Silk Road.

Window on the Roof

As the early Uygurs were a nomadic people, they did not live in permanent houses. It was only when an increasing number of them began to engage in farming did they begin to build permanent houses. A traditional Uygur house in the countryside is a squarish structure of clay. In addition to the windows in the walls, there is a window in the roof for better lighting. Since the local clay is good in moisture resistance, the flat rooftops are smoothly plastered with clay and used for drying fruit and melons or planting flowers. The rooftops are therefore called roof gardens. Inside the house is a large solid platform bed about one-third of a metre high, on which people sleep at night and sit during the day. There are recesses in the walls for storing food and articles for everyday use. Some families like to build the recesses in geometric shapes and border them with plaster decorations.

The Uygurs love to hang wall rugs. Some well-to-do families often hang rugs on all the four walls, turning the room into a place of unusual splendour. The room is heated in winter with fire burning inside a double wall. The side with the heated wall is reserved for guests and the elders of the family. With improvement in their living standards, the Uygurs are more particular in choosing building materials, applying architectural techniques and designing interior decoration.

The Uygurs in southern Xinjiang build their houses inside a square courtyard. Families who closely follow customs have a taboo against having the front door of the house on the western side. The courtyards are kept tidy and clean and planted with fruit trees and flowers.



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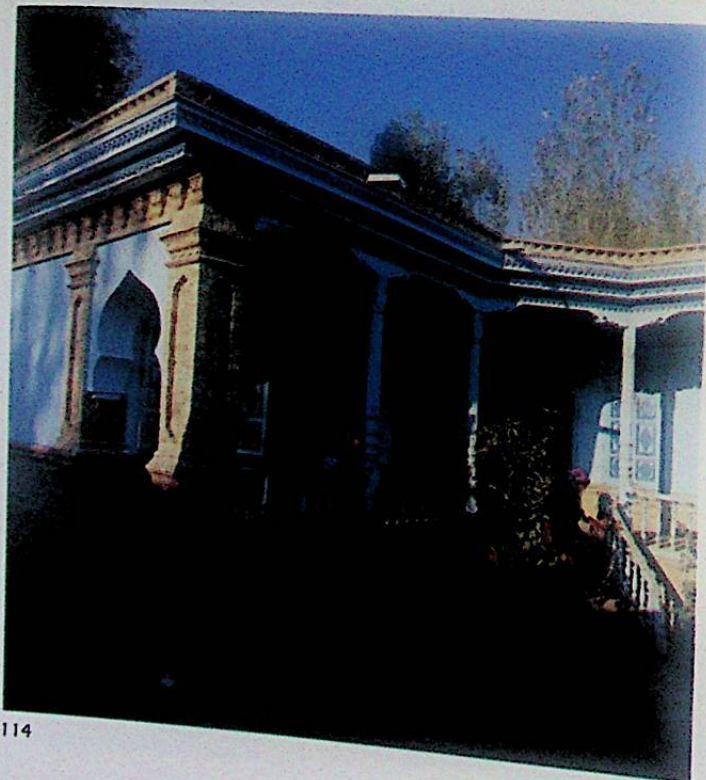
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Colourful Caps with Four Pointed Corners

The Uygurs are dressed in simple clothes of good taste without elaborate ornaments. Men in the countryside wear a gown known as Kapan. Made with cotton cloth, more often with black-and-white stripes, it reaches to the knees, opens on the right and has a slanted collar. There are no buttons; it is fastened at the waist with a long band. Under the Kapan, the men wear a pair of trousers. Most of the women in the villages wear ample-sleeved dresses and waistcoats buttoned in the front and cover their heads with silk scarfs. In the cities and towns, men favour Western-style suits and leather shoes and women wear dresses in the summer and Western-style overcoats on top in the winter.

Men and women, old and young alike, the Uygurs like to wear a light, close-fitting and brimless cap with four pointed corners. Known as Tuoba in the Uygur language, the cap has a long history and is made in many varieties. Oiyiman and Badanmu are two principal types. The former is embroidered with golden and silvery threads and decorated with colourful beads. Gleaming with dazzling colours, this type of cap is favoured by girls and young men. The latter is named after Badan apricot, which flowers and bears fruit in the arid desert. Designs of the crescent-shaped Badan apricot stones are embroidered with white thread on the cap and then surrounded with strings of tiny beads in curves, dots and straight lines, symbolizing gentle streams watering the Badan apricot trees. The caps worn by the elderly people are quietly elegant. The Uygur small caps have become special products of handicraft art. They are often bought as souvenirs for friends afar.

The Uygur women also wear earrings, bracelets and necklaces. They like to paint their eyebrows and glaze their finger nails with nail polish during a festival or a celebration. Small girls wear their hair in a great number of braids. When they are bigger, the number of their braids is equal to their years of age. Married women generally wear two braids with loose ends and adorn their hair with a comb stuck on the back of the head.



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116. Uygur girls wearing colourful caps. Unmarried women plait their hair in the same number of braids as their years of age.
117. All Uygur women can make their own favourite small caps with four pointed corners. Those who are able to sell their caps at the market must be highly skilled.
118. Turpan Basin has been known since ancient times as the "fiery prefecture," where the climate is hot and dry. The sand therapy applied in Turpan is effective for curing arthritis.



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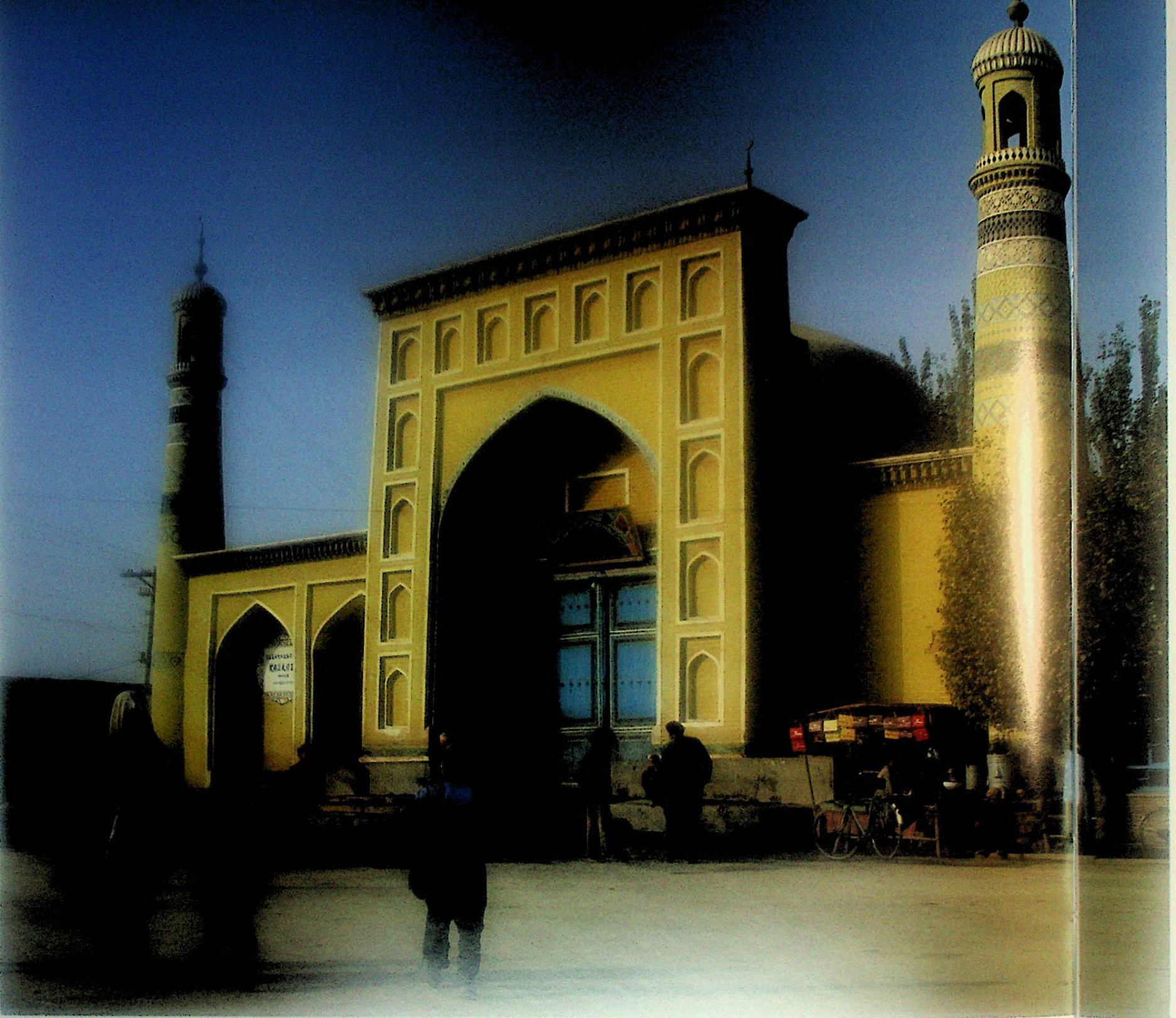
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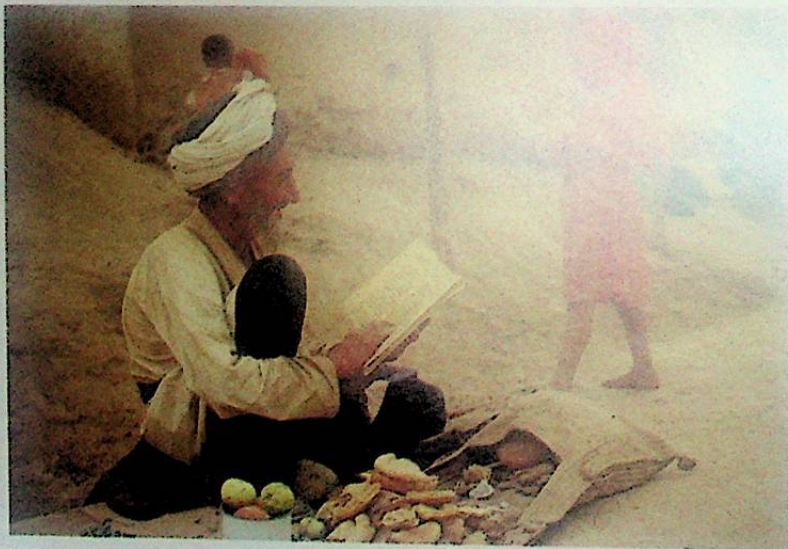
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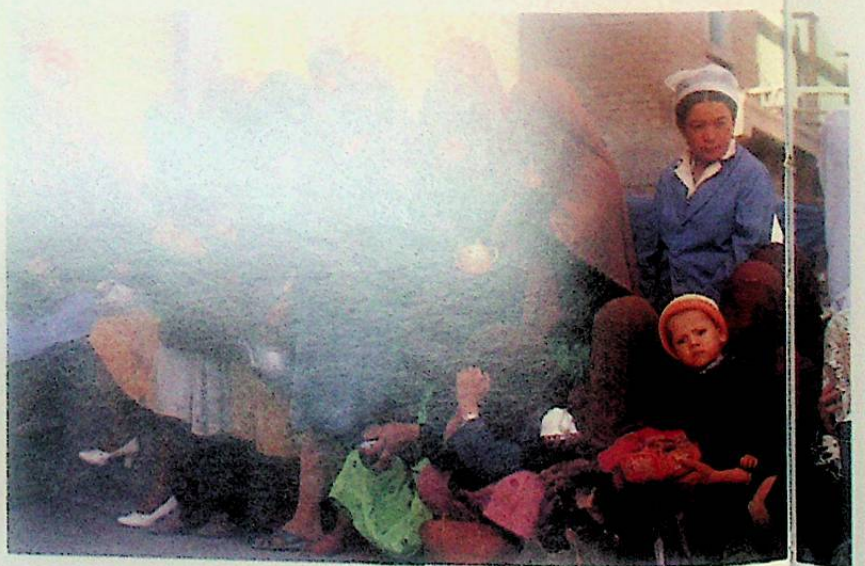




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Religious Festivals

The Uygurs celebrate three major Islamic festivals: Mohammed's birthday, Lesser Bairam and Corban Bairam, which are the festivals of all Islamic nationalities. Mohammed's birthday falls on the thirteenth day of the third month on the Islamic calendar. The day is also believed to be the anniversary of his death. Moslems congregate in the mosque on that day to pray and listen to the Ahung who retells the Prophet Mohammed's historical deeds and extols his noble character.

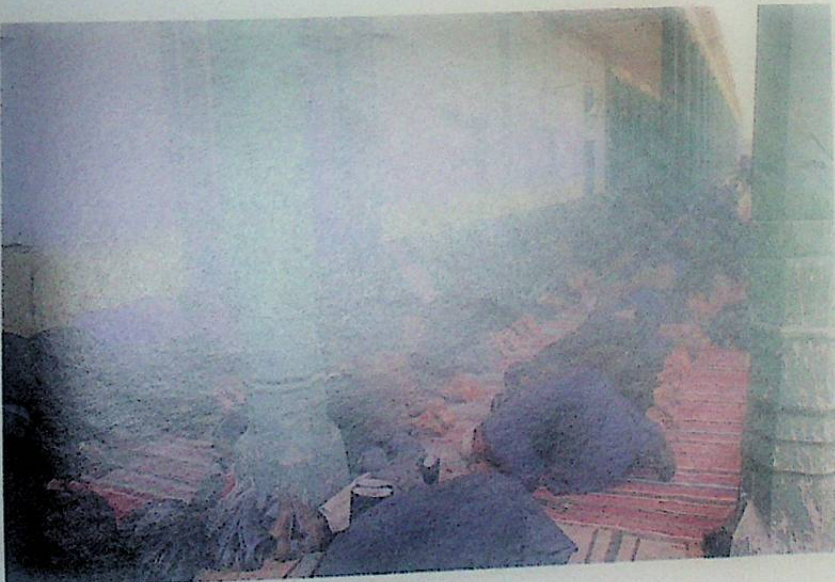
The Lesser Bairam, also called the end of Ramadan, is held on the first day of the tenth month to celebrate the end of the month of fasting. People bathe themselves, put on clean clothes and come to the mosque for the ceremony. They wish one another a happy holiday. After the ceremony, the festival is celebrated with many kinds of entertainments.

The Corban Bairam, the Uygur New Year, is a grand occasion. It falls on the tenth day of the twelfth month on the Islamic calendar and is also known as the Day of Sacrifice. It is said that the Prophet Abraham dreamed a dream one night, in which Allah, the God, told him to kill and sacrifice his son Ismail. On the following morning, when Abraham was about to put the order into execution, Allah told him to kill a sheep instead. To remember Abraham's touching loyalty and to express gratitude for Allah, Moslem families kill sheep as sacrifices on that day. Guests are entertained with an abundance of food and there will be performances of songs and dances.

The Aitgar Mosque

The Aitgar Mosque in the city of Kashgar is the largest mosque and highest Islamic academic institution in Xinjiang. Reportedly built during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), this grand structure can hold ten thousand people in a prayer ceremony. Its front door which faces the east consists of an arch above and a square door below. An eighteen-metre-high minaret stands on either side of the door, where an Ahung's prayer can be heard in all directions. A pond in the courtyard supplies the Koran scholars in the mosque and prayers with clear water for drinking and bathing. The prayer hall on the western side of the courtyard is built in the Arabic style with an arched dome and supported by 160 columns. The square in front of the mosque is the place for thousands of male Moslems to perform the religious Sama dance. During religious festivals, believers from all parts of Kashgar will gather here to celebrate the occasions with jubilation.

119. The Aitgar Mosque in Kashgar.
120. An old Uygur reading the Koran. The Moslems are assiduously devoted to the Koran. They bathe themselves before reading it and keep all other thoughts from their minds while reading it.
121. Uygurs waiting for a prayer service in front of the Aitkar Mosque. Many of them carry small pots, which they will fill with clean water and clean themselves before the prayer.
122. The hall of prayer in the Aitgar Mosque.



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