

# ISLAMIC

FRONTIERS OF

# CHINA

SILK ROAD IMAGES



photography and text HOW MAN WONG

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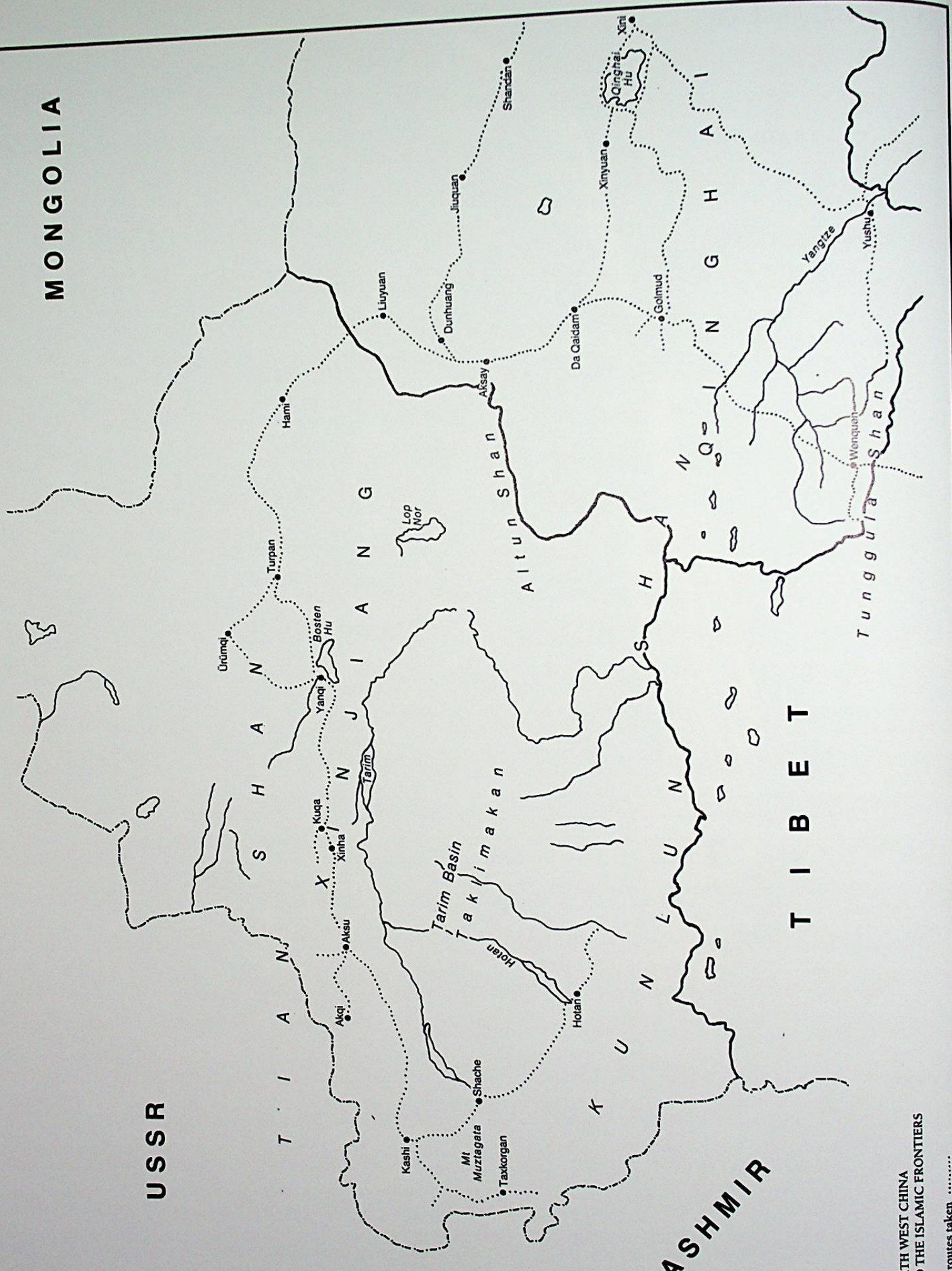
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MONGOLIA

USSR

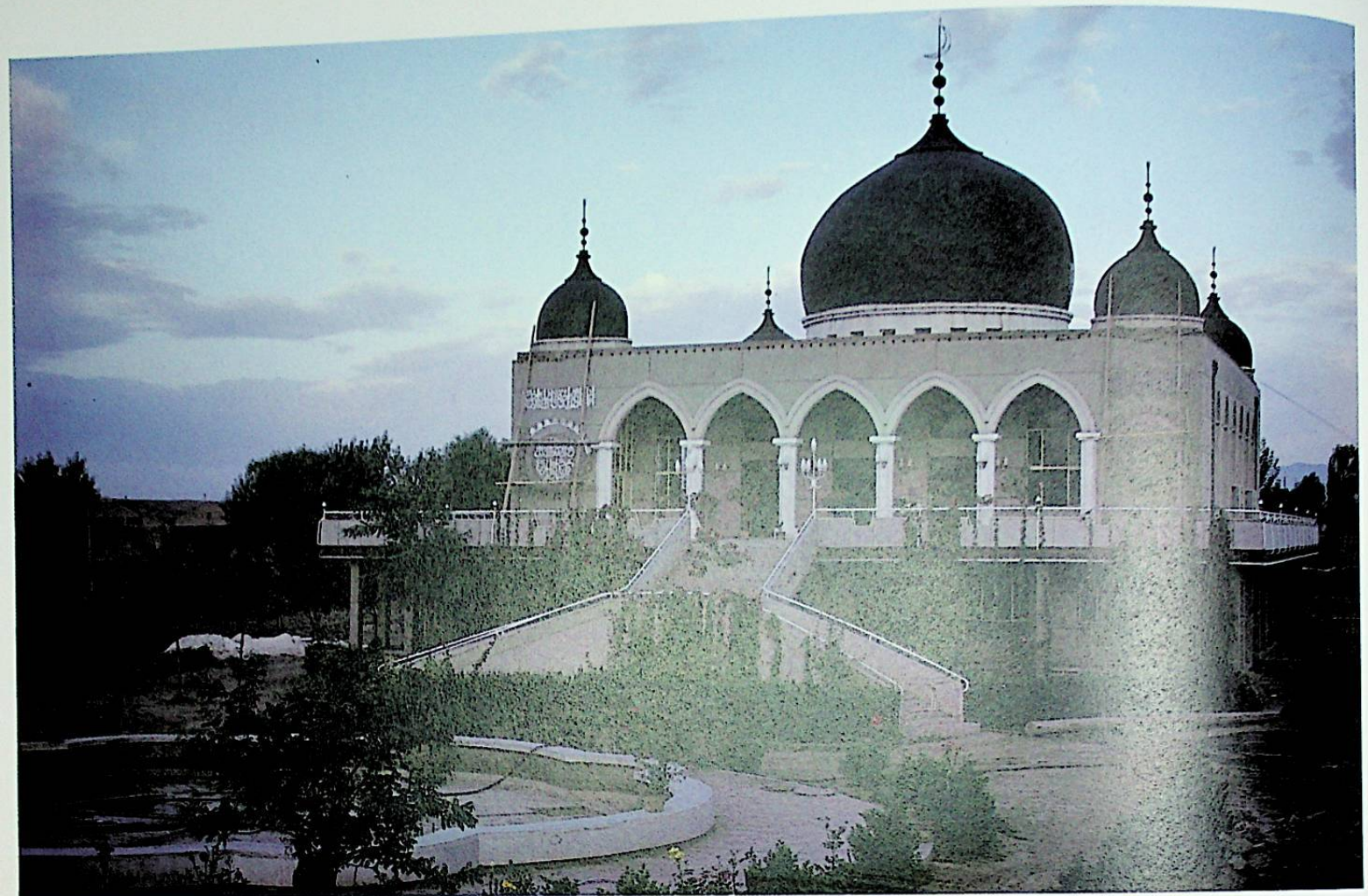
KASHMIR

T I A N S H A N  
S H A N  
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A I T U N S H A N  
N Q I N G H A I  
K U N L U N  
T I B E T  
T u n g g u i a S h a n



NORTH WEST CHINA AND THE ISLAMIC FRONTIERS

The routes taken .....



31 (previous pages) Standing high on two front corners of the tomb of Appak Hoja at Kashgar on the Silk Road, these minaret-like towers, built around 1873, are decorated with glazed ceramic tiles and reliefs.

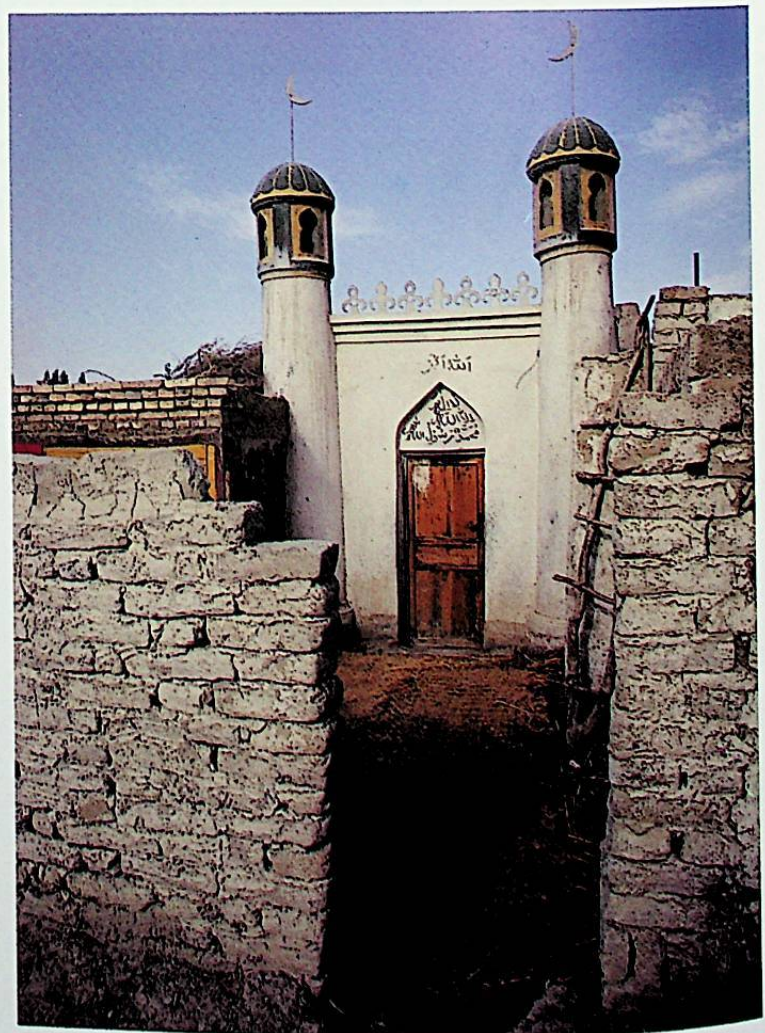
32 (previous pages) The mosque outside Turfan has a memorial minaret built around 1799 and dedicated to King Imin. It incorporates some of the most decorative designs in brick architecture in western China.

33 (top) The great mosque at Yinchuan with its five domed roofs bears a strong resemblance to the architecture of the Islamic homeland.

34 (bottom) At a roadside mosque at Kuqa, two towers stand as the minarets common to many mosques. Smaller mosques like this help bind the local community together.

35 (opposite top) Floral and geometric designs adorn the ceiling of the entrance to a mosque outside Kashgar.

36 (opposite bottom) Murals of flowers and vases surround a creative use of Arabic script decorating the walls of an old village mosque of the Salar people at Xunhua in Qinghai Province.





وَأَبِيهِ وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ لِكُلِّ فِرْقٍ مِّنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ  
شَارِعَةٌ يَتَّخِذُهَا حُجَّةً وَصَاحِبُهُ مُقَنَّبَةٌ  
وَجُوهُهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ أُولَئِكَ

سَيُؤْتُونَ لَهُمْ نَسِيمًا مِّنْهُم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ هُمُ الْكَافِرُونَ الْفَجْرَةَ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

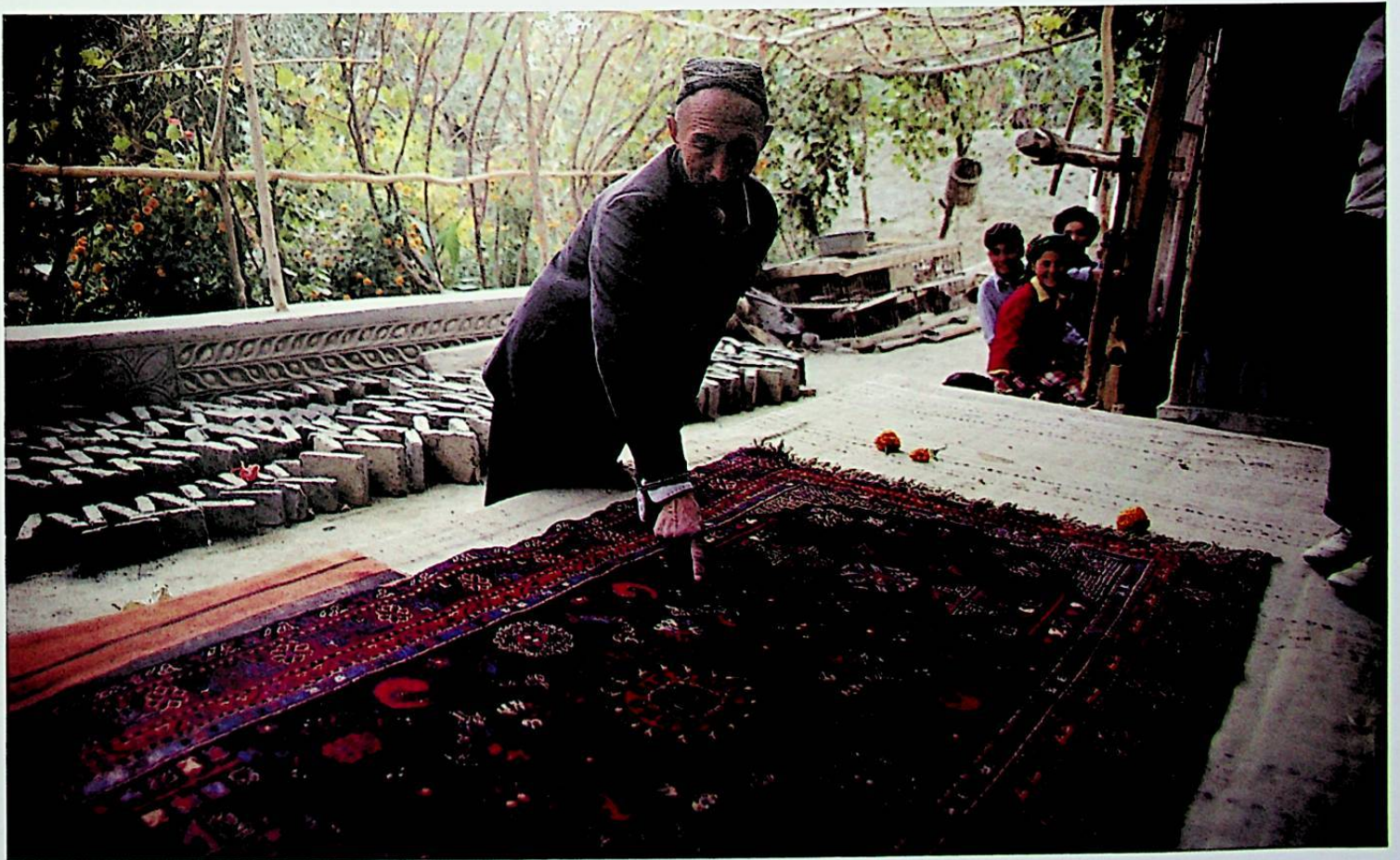
إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ وَإِذَا  
الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ  
حُشِرَتْ وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ رُجِّجَتْ  
وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ  
نُشِّرَتْ وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ  
سُعِّرَتْ وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ عَلِمَتْ نَفْسُ مَا أَحْضَرَتْ

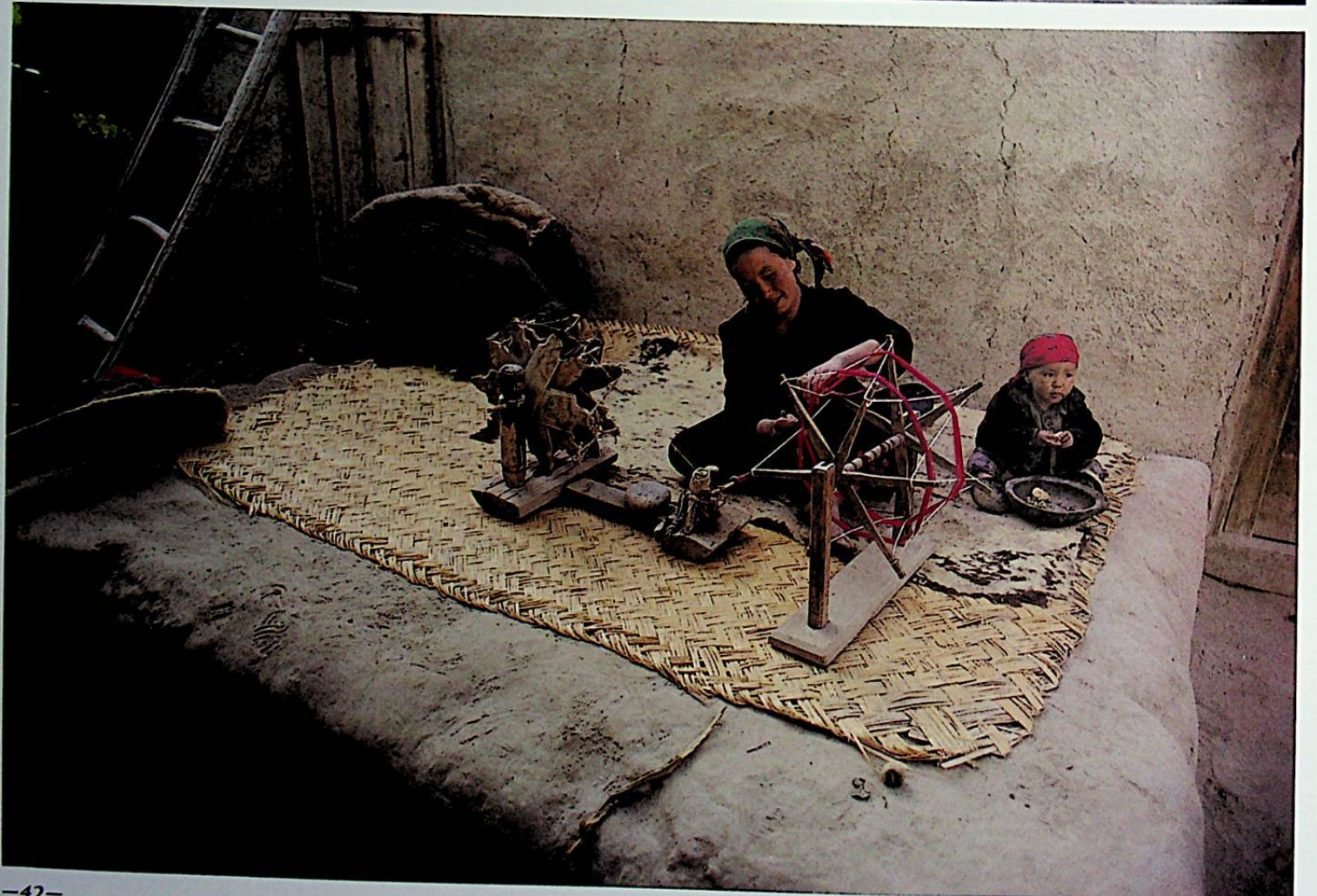
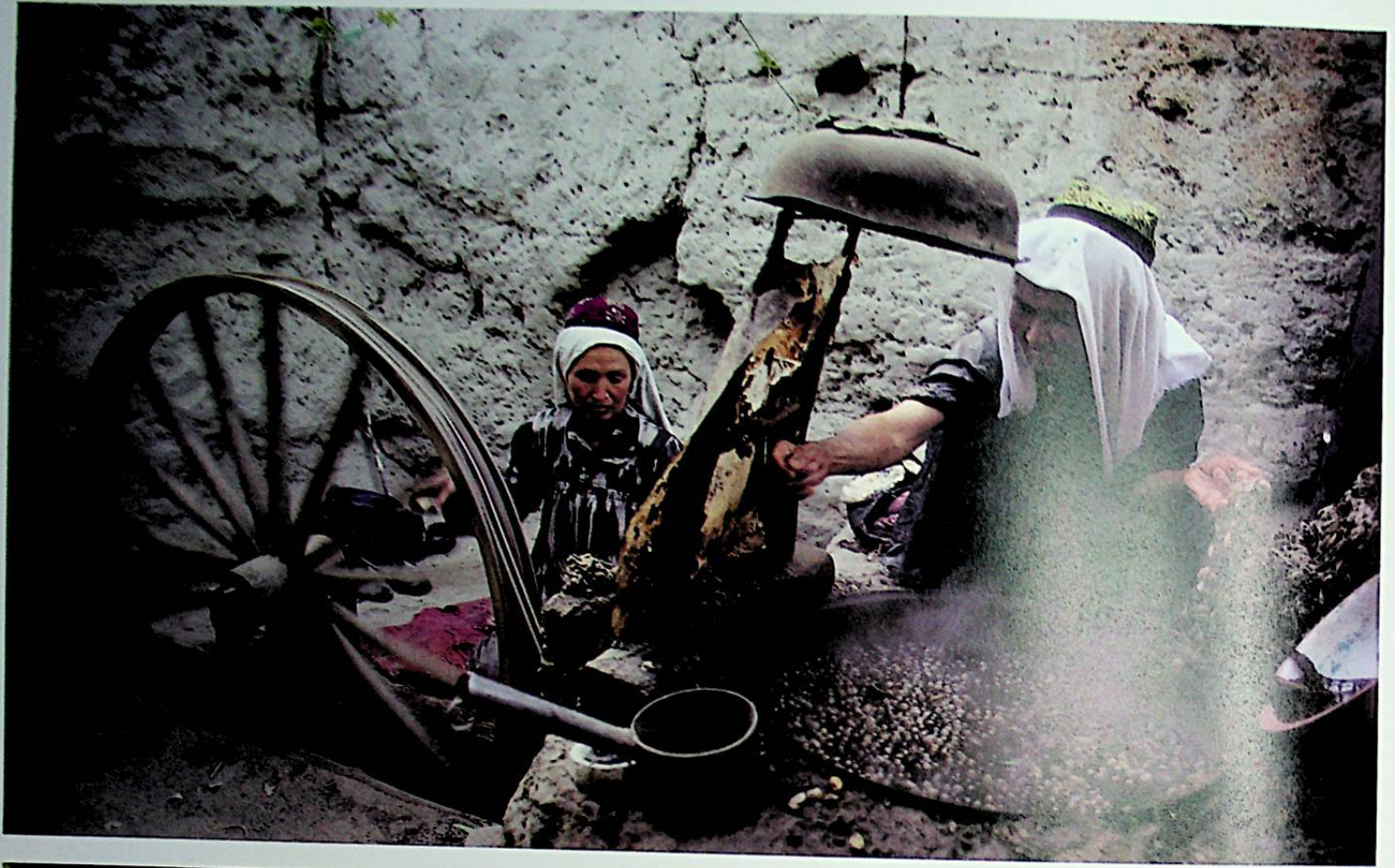
فَلَا أَقْسَمُ بِالْخُنُوسِ الْجَوَارِ الْكُنُوسِ وَالْيَأْسَ إِذَا عَسَسَ  
وَالصَّبْحَ إِذَا انْفَسَرَ أَنَّهُ لَقَوْلِ رَسُولِ كَرِيمٍ ذِي قُوَّةٍ  
عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ  
مَعْنُوتٌ وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأَفْوَاهِ الْمُتَكِينِ وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى  
الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ فَأَيْنَ  
تَدْعُونَ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ لَمْ يَأْمُرْكُمْ أَنْ  
يَسْتَقِيمُوا وَمَا تَشَاوَرُوا إِلَّا أَرَيْنَا لَكُمْ آيَاتِنَا  
بِئْرٍ لَوْ فَطَرْتُمْ كَيْدًا تَشِينَعْنَ عَنَّا وَإِنَّ آيَاتِنَا

لَشَدِيدَةٌ  
بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ وَإِذَا الْكَوَالِبُ انْفَطَرَتْ وَإِذَا  
الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ











37 (previous pages) Two pages from an ancient Koran, purportedly carried by Salar ancestors when they migrated from Samarkand some 700 years ago. Today the book is a sacred relic of the Salar people in Qinghai Province.

38 (previous pages) Along the southern stretches of the Silk Road in Hotan, women in remote villages still boil the silkworm cocoon in time-honoured fashion and reel the silk with hand-cranked wooden wheels. The black and white dress of the woman is a traditional pattern made from silk.

39 (previous pages) A woman of Hotan spinning silk with a traditional wooden machine as her child watches.

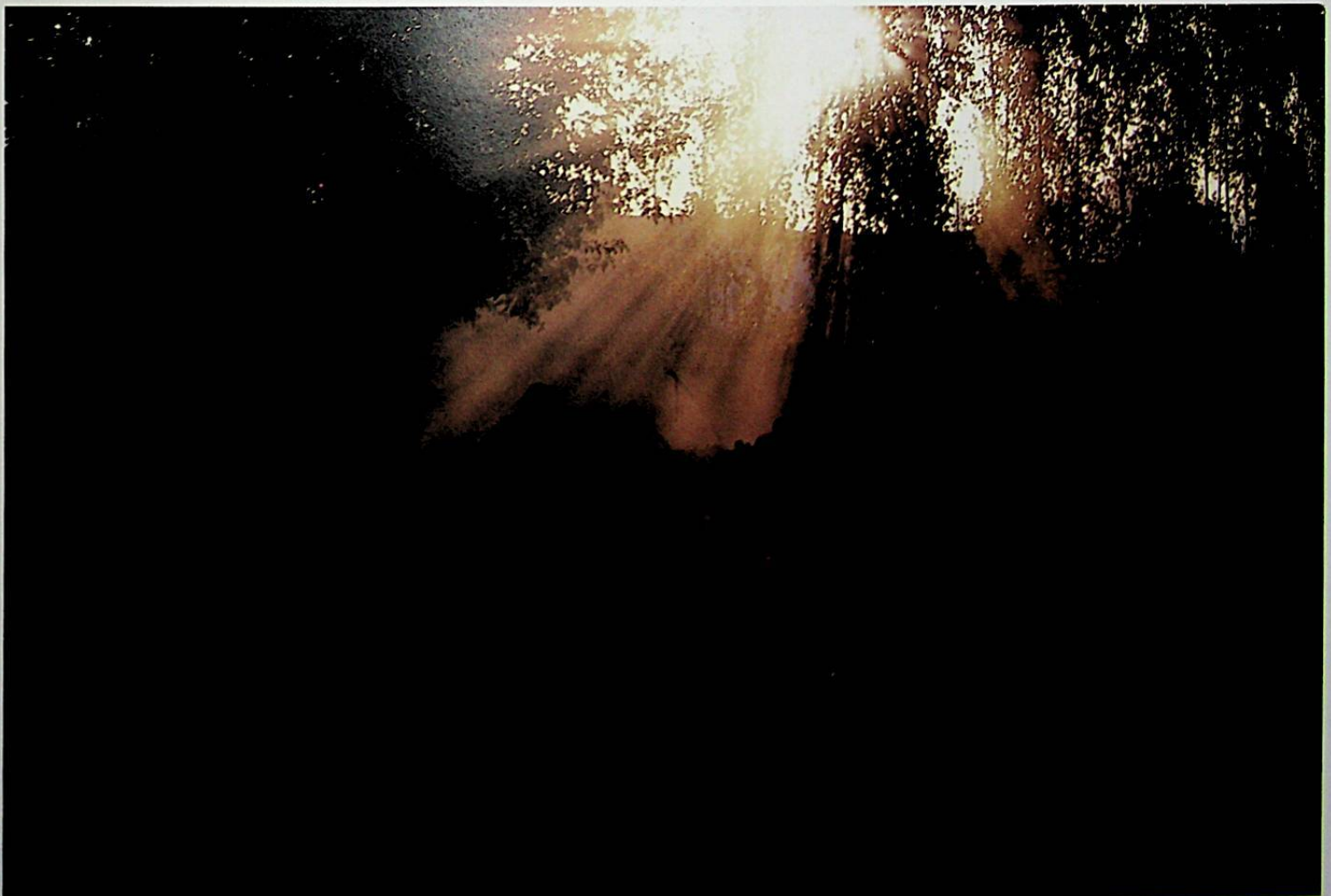
40 (previous pages) In the countryside of Hotan on the southern Silk Road, Uygur weavers work a loom as they make a wool carpet with traditional designs.

41 (previous pages) An old Uygur man displays a silk carpet in traditional design that he wove as a child with his father decades ago. Resilient and durable, some of the more decorative silk carpets are hung on walls rather than used on the floor.

42 (previous pages) An old man in a village near Hotan weaves silk into fabric as he works on a wooden loom similar to those used many centuries ago.

44 (following pages) Sunday markets and bazaars along the Silk Road are the most popular sites for business transactions. Thousands attend the one at Kuqa by the river banks, while the bazaar at Kashgar has tens of thousands in attendance. Mule and horse carts bring all kinds of goods to be sold or exchanged.

43 A morning sun shines through poplar and willow trees in Hami, silhouetting a man preparing his mule cart for work.



# ISLAM COMES TO CHINA

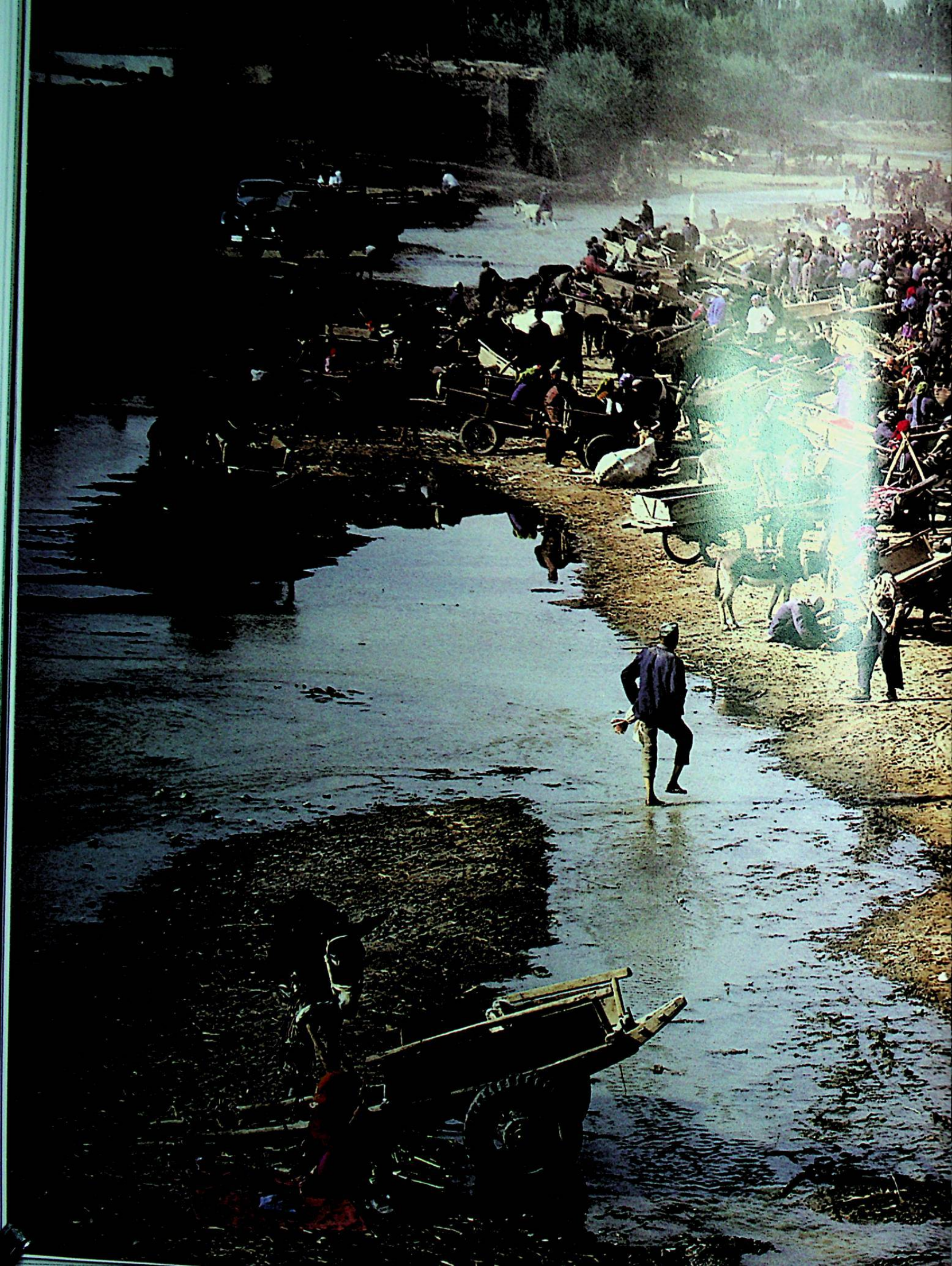
**In all the provinces, there is a town for the Moslems and in this they reside. They also have cells, colleges and mosques and are made much by the Emperor. In a certain part of this province is a town in which Moslems reside. It has a market and a mosque and a cell for the poor. Here is also a judge and a Sheikh al Islam; nor is there any doubt that there must be in all the towns Moslem merchants who have a judge and a Sheikh ul Islam to whom matters are referred.**

The country referred to in the quotation is China, the date 1324-1325 AD and the writer, the famous Arab traveller Ibn Battuta, who had left his native Tangiers and travelled extensively throughout Asia and China, a little more than thirty years after Marco Polo had left the Far East.

Ibn Battuta was, from a historical perspective, a relative latecomer to China since commercial exchange between China and the Middle East dates back to pre-Islamic times, justifying the historical epitaph of the 'Arabs as the carriers of the world between the East and West'. The overland route, the Silk Road, was the world's longest trade route and reached from China to Constantinople and onto Rome, and the hazardous sea route stretched from Siraf in the Arab Gulf, through the Straits of Malacca and on to Canton. These two most vital arteries of trade formed the natural channels of commercial, cultural and, at a later stage, religious contact between the Arab world and China.

However, the official entry of Islam into China is obscured by romantic legends and folklore and is difficult to verify, since Islam was not carried to China as part of a proselytizing mission but flowed naturally along well-defined trade arteries between China and the Middle East. A legend amongst the Chinese Muslims links the coming of Islam to China with the Emperor T'ai Tsung, the second ruler of the Tang Dynasty and one of China's greatest emperors, who laid the framework of governmental institutions that were to last for the next millennium.







'Now,' continued the Emperor, 'I would like to know whether this be a good or an ill omen.' Thereupon the Interpreter of Dreams stepped out of the ranks of officials and said: 'The turbaned man is a Muslim from the West. Far beyond, in Arabia is a Muslim king of lofty mind and great virtue, whose country is wealthy and his troops are brave, and whose land produces rare and precious things, The customs of the country are liberal to a degree. I have heard that in the West a great Sage is born. On the natal day the sun showed many colours, the night was lengthened to eight watches, white clouds covered the hill tops, and when the True Book came from heaven a white vapour rose to the sky; therefore, because of the birth of the Sage favourable omens abounded. That the monsters entered the Palace indicates that strange and evil influences are

at work in the heart of things, therefore came this omen of trouble. These monsters then must be dealt with by the Muslims if they are to be destroyed.' At that, a Prince of the Court named Han Shih-Ki stepped forward and said: 'I have heard well of the Muslims as being straight forward and true, gracious in their behaviour and loyal in their allegiance first and last. As to a plan for the present, throw open the pass, let communication be unhindered, place no restriction on intercourse and thus encourage peace. I beseech my lord to issue a decree sending an ambassador across the Western frontier to the Muslim king, asking him to send a sage to deal with the evils that threaten so that the country may be at peace.'

Hui-Hui Yuan-lai, as translated by C F Hogg-Marshall Broomhall, *Islam and China*

46 A Hui man in Lanzou toasting bread on a metal burner. Besides selling his bread, he would also charge a small fee for people who bring their own flour dough.



T'ai Tsung came to the throne in 626, four years after the Prophet Muhammad and his followers left Mecca for Medina. The foundations for two movements that would change the course of history were being established in the far-flung towns of Medina and Sian, the capital of the Tang Dynasty. According to Chinese Muslim legend, one night T'ai Tsung had a dream:

I dreamed of a turbaned man and of monsters . . . The man in the turban, with his hands clasped and murmuring prayers, pursued the monsters . . . To look on, he (had) indeed a strange countenance, totally unlike ordinary men; his face was the colour of black gold . . . his moustache and beard were cut . . . short and even; he had phoenix eyebrows, and a high nose and black eyes. His clothes were white and powdered, a jewelled girdle of jade encircled his loins, on his head was . . . a cloth turban like a coiled dragon. His presence was awe-inspiring. . .

When he entered he knelt towards the West, reading the book he held in his hand. When the monsters saw him they were at once changed into . . . proper forms, and in distressful voices pleaded for forgiveness. But the turbaned man read on for a little, till the monsters turned to blood and at last to dust, and at the sound of a voice the turbaned man disappeared.

45 In Kashgar, a sumptuous family banquet is given in honour of a little boy of seven to celebrate his circumcision and entry into manhood.





The legend continues that the Emperor dispatched an officer named Shih T'ang who went to Arabia and returned with three emissaries from the Prophet, one of whom was meant to be a companion of the Prophet and his maternal uncle, Sa'd Ibn Abu Waqqas, who is considered by the Chinese Muslims to be the first apostle of Islam to China. Abu Waqqas is reputed to have built China's first mosque in Canton and his purported tomb in the Islamic cemetery in Canton is now a Muslim shrine. The legend is clearly apocryphal but, as with all legends, does underline the early contacts between the Middle Kingdom and the Western Territories, as the Middle East was then known.

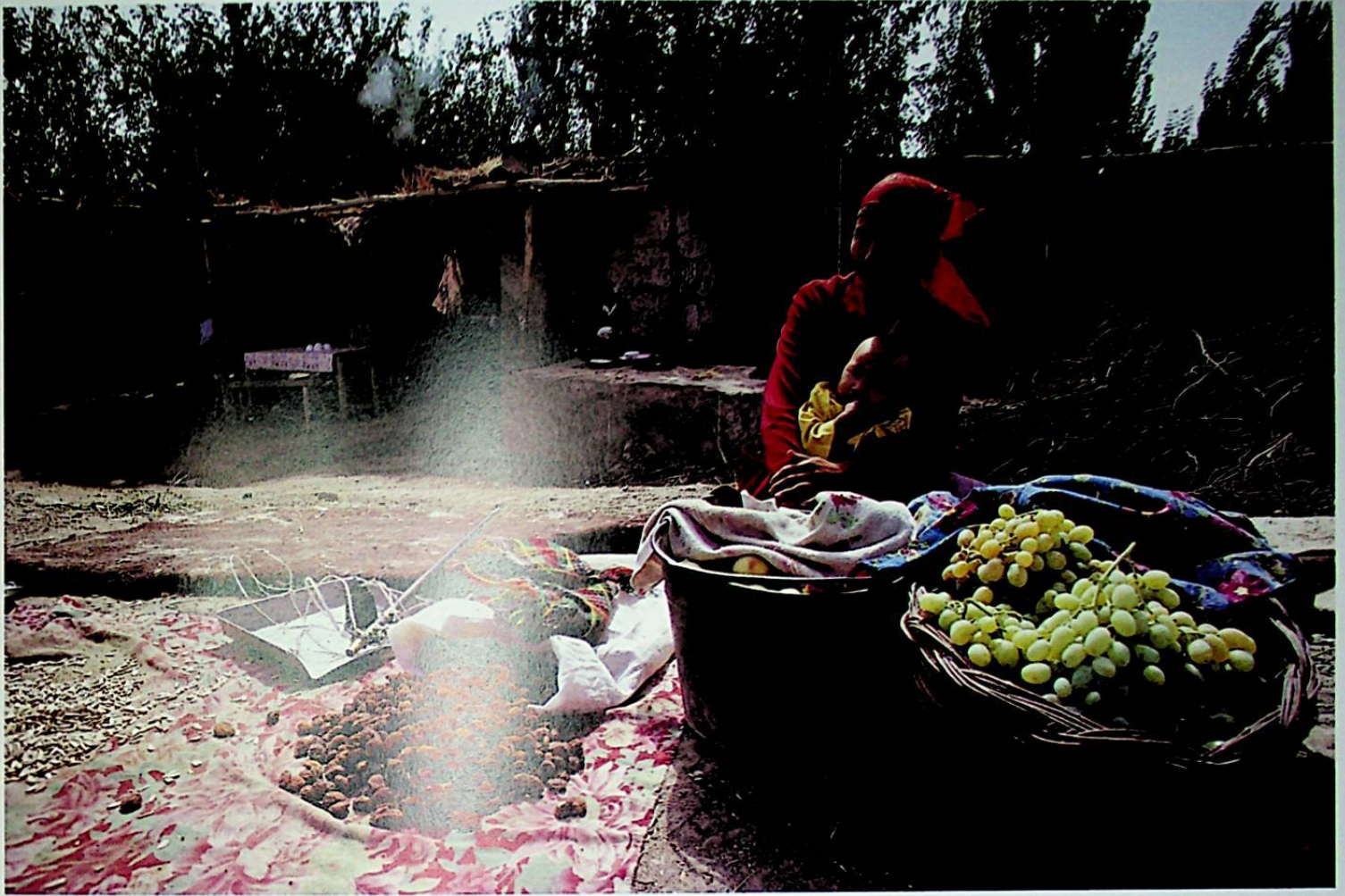
According to Tang annals, 651 is the formal date of the introduction of Islam to China. In that year they

record that 'the King of Arabia sent for the first time an envoy with presents to the Chinese court and at the same time announced that the Arabs had already reigned 34 years and had had three kings'. The 'King of Arabia' was the third caliph, Uthman. It is interesting that in the same year as the official delegation from the Caliph Uthman to China in 651, the Persian Sasanid shah, Peroz, who ruled many of the areas later conquered by Islam, appealed to the Emperor, Kao Tsung, for support against the Muslim Arabs. Both China and the Sasanids saw a potential threat in the disruption of the Silk Road by the Islamic conquests and the former feared that the collapse of Sasanid Persia would strengthen the marauding Turkic tribes of Central Asia and encourage their attacks on China.

47 At Tongxin in Ningxia, a Hui man juggles his food over the frying pan with the skill of a master chef. In Islamic restaurants, recipes and ingredients conform strictly to Islamic dietary law.

48 (opposite) Kneading the heavy dough in preparation for making noodles, a kitchen helper at Xining performs the routine of stretching and rolling before threading the noodles by hand.



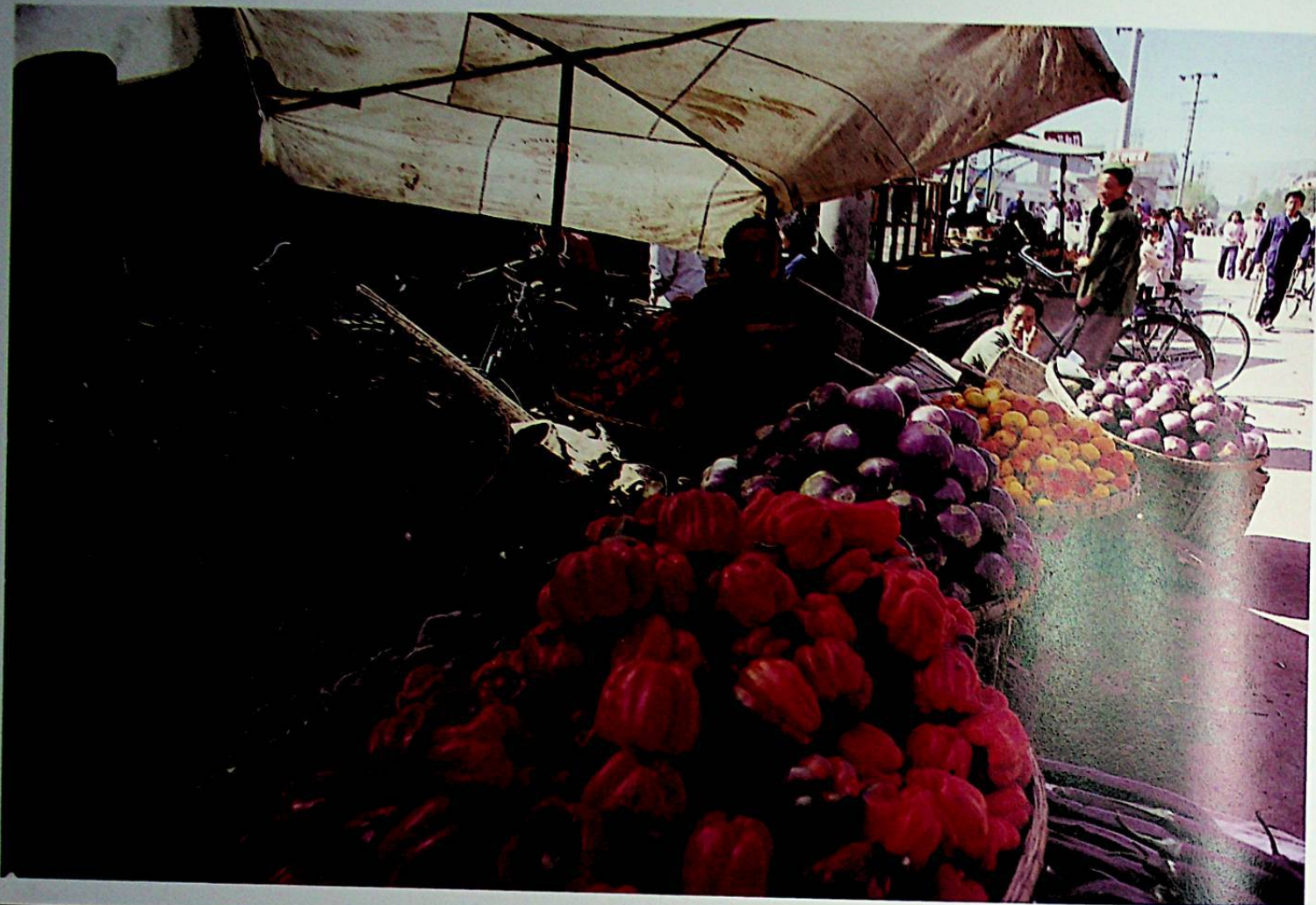


53 Along the road from Turfan to Urumqi, an Uygur mother and child sit on the roadside selling grapes and dates.

54 (following pages) The harvest of grapes at the Turfan vineyard in Xinjiang Province.

51 (opposite top) Pepper, aubergine and tomato are favourites on vegetable stalls at Xining in Qinghai province.

52 (opposite bottom) At Putugou, where some of the best grapes are grown, two Uygur men hang bunches of grapes on vertical trellises for drying into raisins.









During the Tang Dynasty the Muslims who came and settled in China were for the most part mindful of the Golden Age of the Abbasids in which the Islamic Empire was at its most powerful. They were known as the Black Robed Muslims and were considered, and wished to be considered, as aliens. Their eventual integration as Chinese Muslims was a gradual process given impetus by the arrival of the Mongols and Genghis Khan, who destroyed the Abbasids in 1258 and the Sung Dynasty in 1260, and established the Yuan Dynasty.

During the Yuan Dynasty, Islam spread to the interior of China, forming communities in Gansu and Yunnan. Many Muslims were resettled from the Islamic lands which were under the rule of the Mongols and were given important posts in the civil administration and government bureaucracy. Kublai Khan appointed Shams al-Din Omar, known as Sayyid al-Ajall, who claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad, as Governor of Yunnan in 1273. He was succeeded by his

son and grandson and the tomb of Sayyid al-Ajall and his cenotaph in Canton are still today important testaments to this Muslim dynasty in Yunnan.

Marco Polo came across many Muslim enclaves on his travels in China during the Yuan Dynasty and the Arab traveller, Ibn Battuta, visited his Muslim brethren on his trip to China in 1324-1325: 'This [El Khansa or probably modern day Sian] is the largest city I have seen on the face of the earth. When we approached the city we were met by its judge, the presbyters of Islam and the great merchants. The Muslims are exceedingly numerous here. The whole city is surrounded by a wall, each of the six cities is surrounded by a wall. In the second division are the Jews, Christians and the Turks who worship the sun. There are in the city a great number of Muslims, with some of whom I resided for fifteen days.'

56 Old Uyghur men congregating for a traditional meal at Kashgar. With open palms, they offer the usual blessing before beginning to eat.

57 (following pages) A mural at the Bezeklik grottoes outside Turfan depicts a group of pilgrims from different ethnic backgrounds bearing tribute. Among them, to the upper right, is a man with a turban, indicative of people from the Middle East.



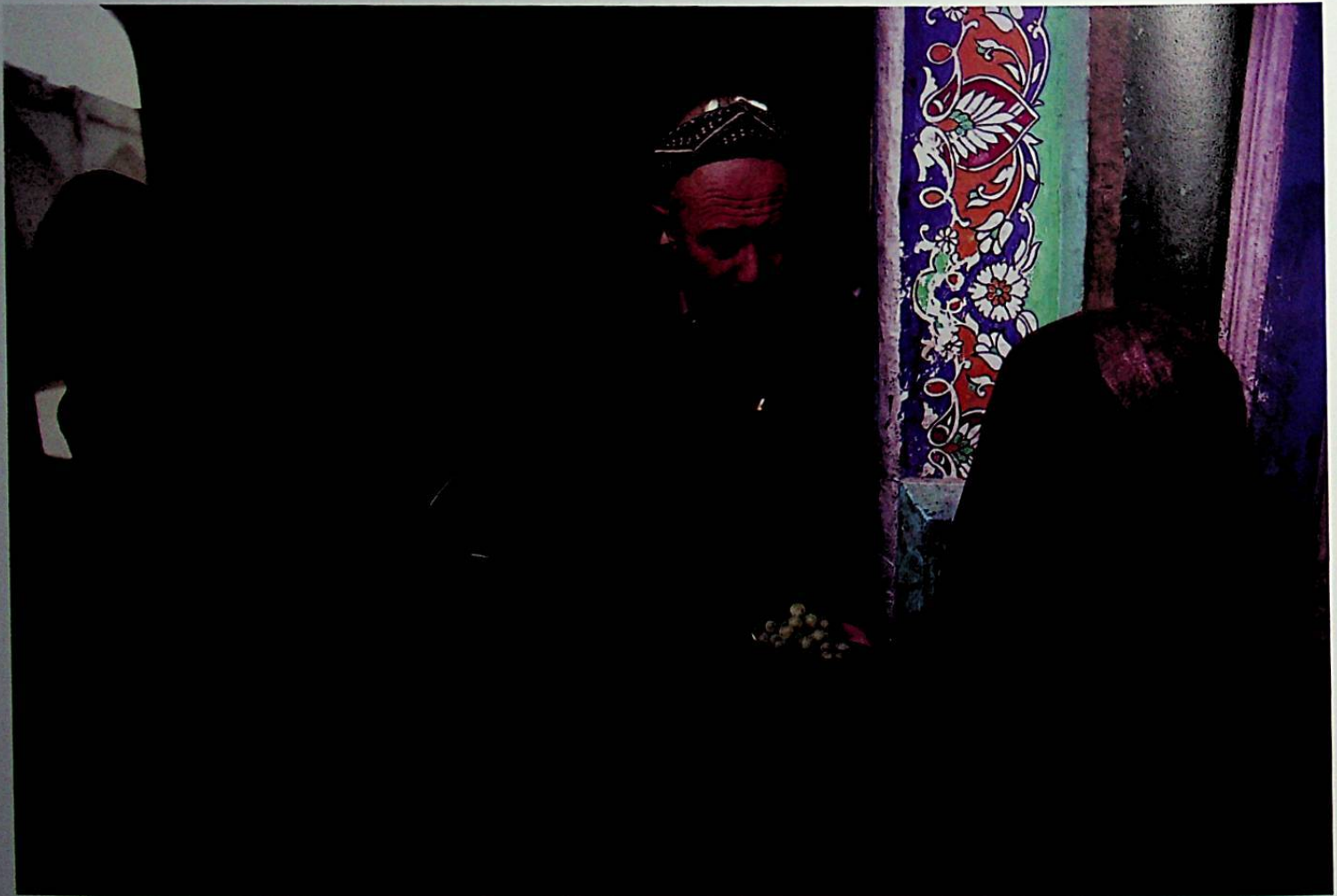
The earliest recorded Islamic sources for travellers' tales in China were entitled *Akhbar al-Sin wa-'l-Hind* or *Observations on China and India* and contain the records of the journeys and experiences of two Muslim travellers to China in the years 815 and 857. Abu Zaid came from Siraf, a town in the Arabian Gulf where goods from China were off-loaded and then transported in other vessels to Basra and Baghdad; he edited the story of a Muslim trader called Sulaiman who visited China in 851.

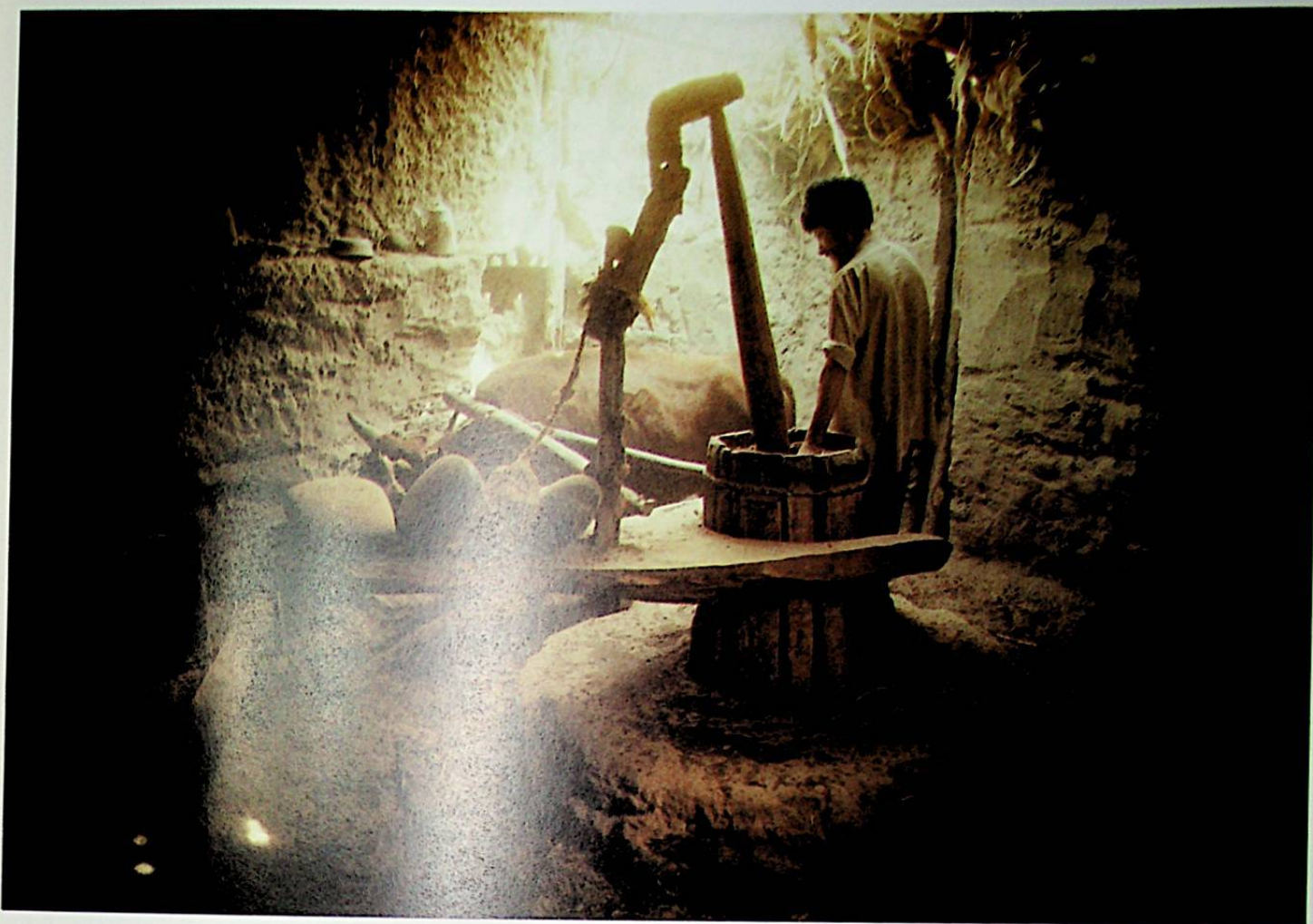
Sulaiman relates that at Kanfu 'which is the principal scale for merchants, there is a Muslim appointed Judge over those of his religion by the authority of the Emperor of China and that he is Judge of all the Muslims who resort to those parts. Upon several days he performs the public service with the Muslims and pronounces the sermon or *khutba* which he concludes in the usual form with a prayer for the Sultan of the Muslims. The Arab merchants who trade thither are in no way dissatisfied with his conduct or his administration in the post he is invested with, because his actions and the judgements

he gives are just and equitable and conformable to the Koran and according to Muslim jurisprudence.' The sea route from Arabia to China was hazardous and Sulaiman recalls the piracy, uncertain winds, frequent fires in Kanfu and extortionate port dues. Yet in spite of these hardships trade flourished.

Another Arab traveller was al-Mas'udi, the 10th century Arab historian whose *Meadows of Gold and Mines of Precious Gems* includes a detailed description of travels in China and the Arab trade enclaves that had sprung up in some of the coastal towns in China and in which the Arabs enjoyed a certain amount of extra-territorial privilege. The Muslim communities throughout Chinese history could not, however, isolate themselves from the vagaries of local politics and unrest and al-Mas'udi included in his works a detailed description of the Huang Ch'ao troubles, previously mentioned, in which some 120,000 foreigners, mostly Muslims, were killed.

55 At the door of the Ieytakar mosque in Kashgar, a fully veiled woman holds out a bunch of grapes for the Uygur men to spit on symbolically as they leave after their Friday service. The fruit is then considered to be blessed.





68 Inside a mud shed in Hotan along the southern Silk Road, an Uygur man uses a cow to work a traditional mill.

martial art. A story relates how the students asked the original teacher the name of this martial art. As the Islamic kung fu master was sipping his tea, he casually quipped, 'Caquan', meaning 'tea boxing'.

Hajj Ma, or *ahung* as the Chinese called the imam, went to Mecca with the Chinese Islamic Association in 1980 as an official group from the People's Republic of China. The group included fifteen other Muslims from all parts of China. Ma indicated that as today's individuals were getting richer because of economic reforms, more and more Muslims were making the

pilgrimage with their own funds. Indeed, we found out a month later that there were over 1,500 Muslims from Xinjiang alone who had been on the 1984 Mecca pilgrimage.

Wiaxinzu was closed by the government during the ten-year Cultural Revolution but was returned to the Muslims in 1982. Recently the mosque had received certain donations, but Hajj Ma assured us that the land held by the mosque produced enough rent to maintain the mosque and its related activities. Ma joined us for Friday prayers which started at 1.30 in the afternoon.



67 Along the bank of the Yellow River at Zhongwei in Ningxia, a Hui engineer poses in front of his machine, a waterwheel which raises water from the river for irrigating fields nearby.

From the outside, Wixinxu (Sage Memorial Temple) with its crimson walls had the same setting as many Chinese monasteries; beyond the walls, a different life was unveiled. Hajj Ma Fengda was waiting at the entrance. 'Salam 'alaykum.' His greetings ushered us into a whole different world – the realm of the Chinese Muslims.

Next to the entrance, an imposing white tower rising over 36 metres served as a minaret, but was once the guiding light for ships coming up the Pearl River, at the end of a hazardous journey from India, the Middle East,

or even further west. Ma told us with a chuckle that the pagoda leaning slightly to one side was interpreted by some as a deliberate motion of bowing to the west, the direction of Mecca.

In the courtyard were about twenty older women beginning their daily exercise of Tai Chi. In an adjacent courtyard, a few young men were performing a more rigorous exercise: 'Caquan', or Islamic boxing. Ma said that because of historic oppression, the Hui (Muslims of Chinese and Arab ancestry) had learned to defend themselves through the development of their own

Our train took us north towards Central China. At Chengzhou, a major railway junction, we were to change trains and travel westward. There are 60,000 Muslims and many mosques in Chengzhou, and some old Muslim settlements in the nearby city of Kaifeng, 70 kilometres away. Since we had a day's respite from travelling, we first visited the mosque on Liberation Road. The imam, Ahung Pan, or Abraham as he was also known, had come here from Ningxia. As a renowned scholar from a predominantly Muslim province, he had been offered a three-year contract to teach at this remote mosque. He served a community of 50,000 Muslims, and his contract would be extended if they liked his teaching.

Carrying an introduction from Ahung Pan, we took a taxi to Kaifeng. Jam Jenwen, 70 years old and one of the two ahungs at the Kaifeng East Mosque, was on hand to greet us. He told us there were six mosques in Kaifeng

with over 30,000 Hui Muslims. His mosque served a community of 4,000 households and he used Arabic during its service. A stone tablet recorded the history of this Tang Dynasty mosque, with the first restoration in the year 1407 during the Ming Dynasty and a second one conducted in 1655 during the Qing. The most recent repair had been effected two years earlier.

A side building functioned as living quarters for older Muslim women who had no relatives. We observed Fatima, 80 years old, in a white veil performing her religious duties. Because she had a knee ailment, a long stool was provided for her; she could sit for prayer while bending her body in symbolic prostration. It was also interesting to see her using beads to count her prayers. A'isha, her friend, surprised us by reciting sections of the Koran in Arabic.

70 Uygur father and son team, near Kashgar, work together in forging a knife. The device next to the furnace is a blower for fanning the fires.



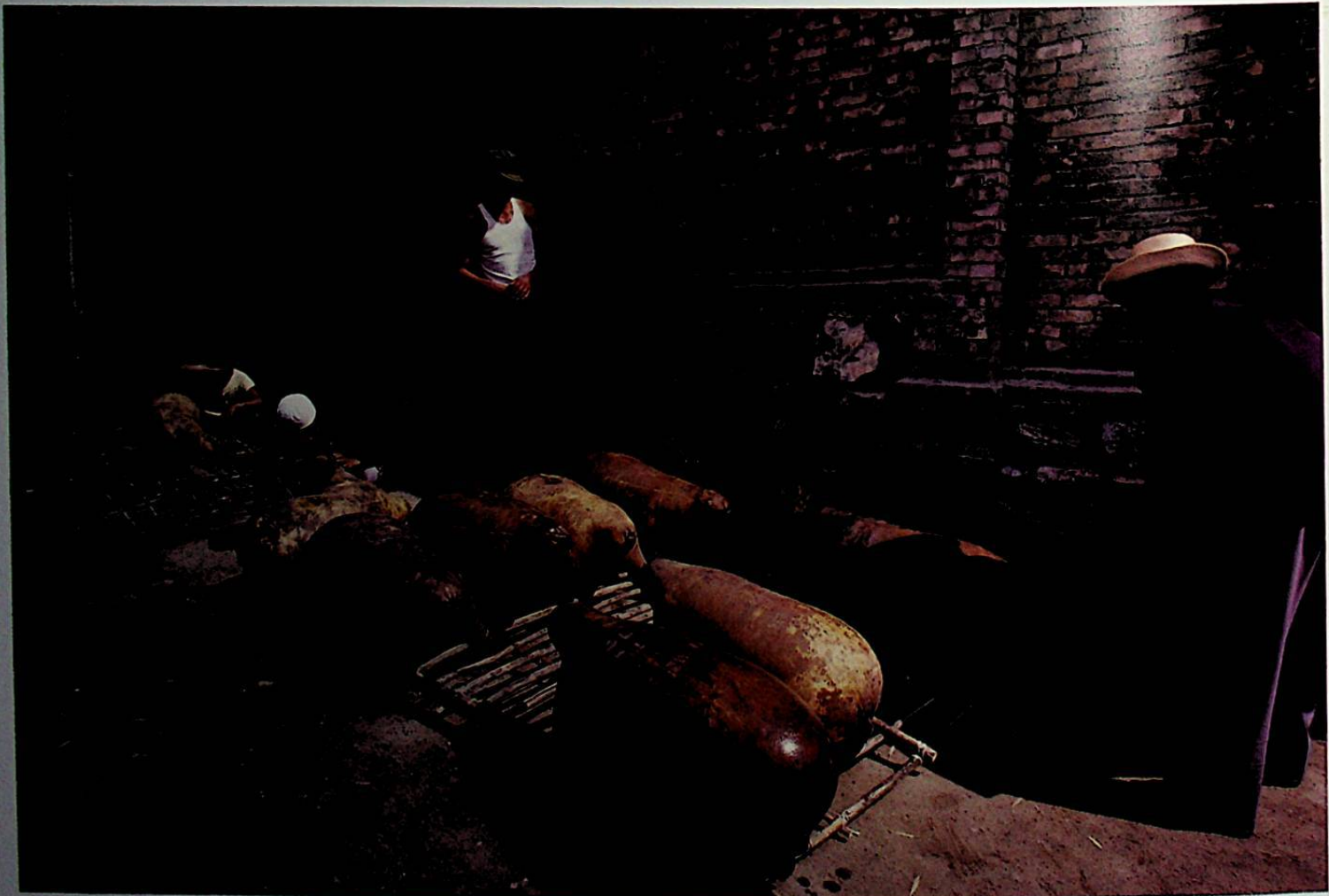
People began filing in around one o'clock. Some were Chinese in appearance except for the little caps they wore. Others had a Middle Eastern, darker complexion. They were of the Hui minority nationality. There were also Turkic-looking Uygurs from Xinjiang on China's western frontier who were doing business in Canton. Ma told us some surprising historical facts about the population. During the Tang Dynasty, there were only 50,000 indigenous inhabitants in Canton whereas the foreign population numbered over 100,000. Dabizilu, the name of the road where the mosque was situated, meant 'Great Benevolent Temple Road', a name with Confucian resonance. Closer examination revealed that it is actually a phonetic translation of 'Big Nose Road', a reference, Ma told me, to the features of

people from the Middle East. Even his family name 'Ma' was derived from the first sound of the name of the Prophet Muhammad.

During prayers, the men stayed to the front of the mosque while the women, in white veils, took up the last row. Afterwards, we retreated to a side chamber where Hajj Ma prayed for the family of a deceased Muslim. In the middle of the table, around which everybody sat, incense was burning in a censor.

It was symbolic that our first visit to a mosque was the Canton mosque, perhaps the first to be built in China. Our subsequent months were spent visiting six of the ten Muslim ethnic groups of China. The Hui, with a population of some 7.5 millions, and largest of the ten groups, was the first group we visited.

*69 Along the bank of the Yellow River at Lanzhou, Luo Jungui and his family are the only household who still have traditional skin rafts; they are made from inflated sheep skins tied over a framework of willow branches.*



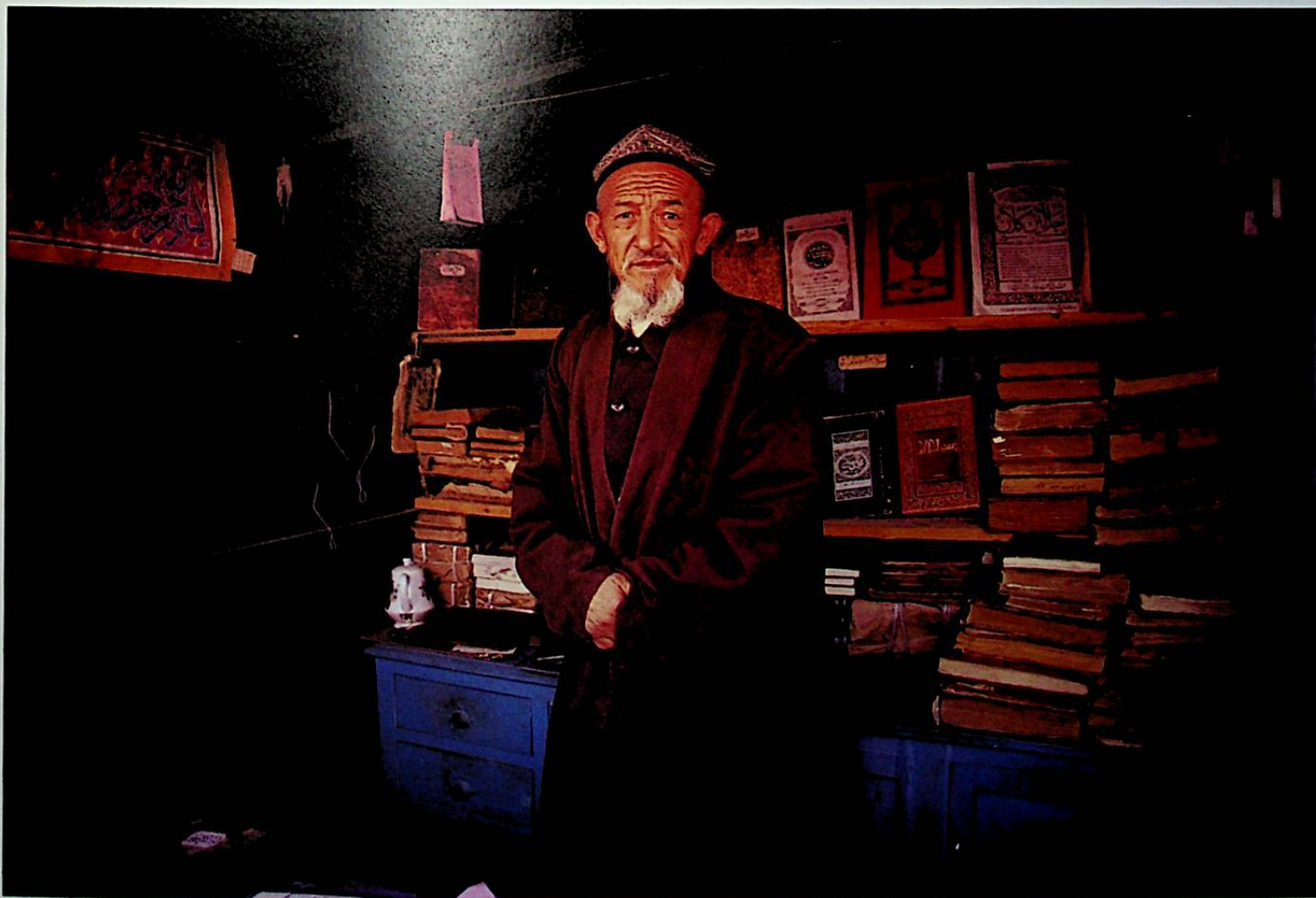
Leaving Xining, we drove east for 150 kilometres to Lanzhou. Here by the bank of the Yellow River was a newly reconstructed mosque. They called their head teacher *imam* rather than *ahung*. Imam Yang Xin, or Yunis, had recently returned to his teaching post where he taught Arabic to young people as well as adults. Just a few years ago, he was condemned to hard labour during the Cultural Revolution. A highly educated man, his spirit was undiminished by seven years of banishment.

Yunis showed us his library of religious books which he had hidden during the Revolution and explained to us the difference between the 'New Sect' he believed in, and the 'Old Sect' of Islam. It seemed a paradox, but according to Yunis, the New Sect was seen as

conforming to the traditional ways of Islam, and the Old Sect was a corrupted form. He gave some examples to clarify the matter for us. The old sect, he said, was incorporating Han culture and custom into its rituals, for instance, wearing black armbands when someone died, building memorial tombs for important people within the community, burning incense, or reciting the Koran when inviting guests for special occasions. According to Yunis, the New Sect was the purified form and interpreted the Koran in a more orthodox fashion.

While we were visiting this very picturesque mosque by the river, some children brought us freshly baked bread. People bring the flour to the bakery and pay a small fee for having their bread baked.

72 A Kashgar bookseller has on his shelves several different versions of the Koran as well as other books in Arabic.



Our next train took us across China, passing Hanan, Shanxi, Shaanxi and Gansu into Qinghai Province. Here, with the help of Governor Hunag Jingpo, we acquired a jeep to take us thousands of kilometres into the field. Before departing on our expedition, we visited two mosques at Xining, provincial capital of Qinghai.

Friday prayers at the great mosque, as it was called, with over 5,000 devotees attending, was quite impressive. But we felt a lot more at home during our visit to a much smaller mosque – Yangjahang Mosque. It was late in the afternoon and many boys were there attending the evening school run by the mosque. In complete unison, they recited the Koran in Arabic. Behind the mosque were boarding rooms for some of the boys. One teenage boy proudly showed us a picture he had drawn of his beloved mosque.

A short walk from Yangjahang was the home of Ahung Ma Deming, or Shams al-Din. His hospitality was unmatched as we were poured rounds and rounds of tea. Dates and lump-sugar were added to produce more flavour. We were also offered biscuits and a variety of fried noodles. When it was Ma's teenage daughter's turn to pour our tea, we noticed the henna on her hand, evidence of the Islamic custom of dyeing one's fingers with the secretion of this plant. The plant was blossoming with little red flowers in their courtyard garden. Before we left, we were offered a rare handwritten copy of the Koran as a sign of friendship. We were pressed to accept this valuable gift and to avoid offending our host, eventually acquiesced, promising one day to present him with our book containing photographs of his family.

71 In the streets of Kashgar, an Uygur hat maker uses a sewing machine to produce caps.





petrol station, there was a long queue. We had a special supply of petrol coupons which were valid throughout the world. The attendants were concerned that some of us wore glasses. They were worried that long-sighted glasses would have the effect of a magnifying glass and were thus a potential fire hazard. This was a matter that was taken very seriously: a warning sign was posted outside the station forbidding anyone to enter with matches, glasses or even shoes with studs.

The road was getting worse by the kilometre as we bounced up and down in our seats. On one occasion, we

asked for directions and were told to follow the asphalted road. Our problem was *finding it!*

At a ferry crossing near Zhongwei, we again came across skin-rafts. Here, in more remote reaches of the Yellow River, the rafts were still in regular use. We asked Karim how much he charged for each crossing. 'It costs ten fen (3 US cents) per crossing and ten more if wheeling a cart. But the fee rises and falls like the river. When the water rises, it is more dangerous, and more expensive. It is also more expensive for foreigners to cross.' We did not appreciate his humour!

74 A Kirgiz woman in the Pamirs weaving a long woollen belt to be used as a girdle for their family yurt

75 (following pages) A huge assortment of religious objects are offered by the Hui merchants to the Tibetans. Near Kumbum Gomba, south of Xinjiang, the trade is mainly controlled by the Hui.



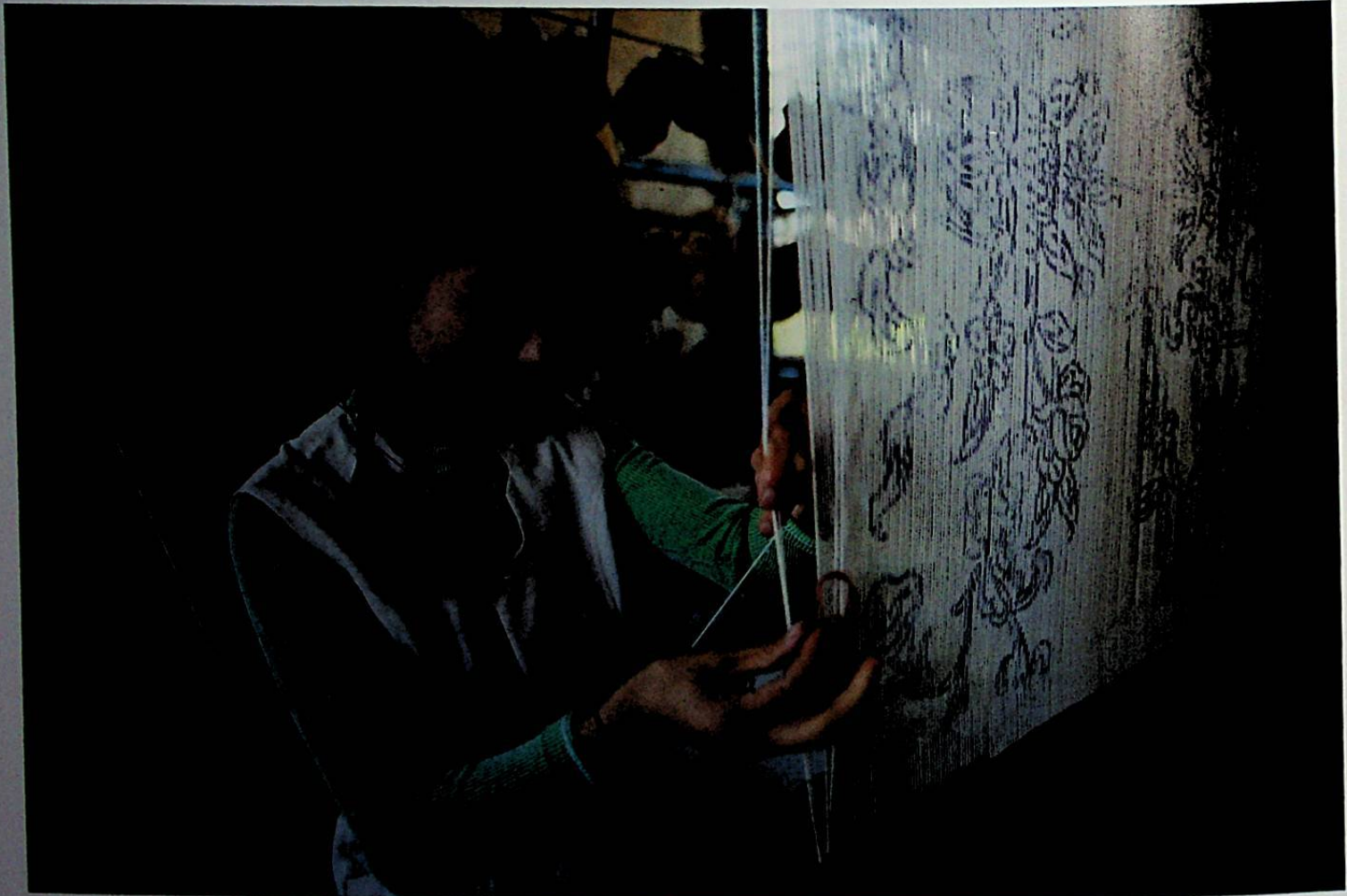
A hundred or so metres down the road lived Luo Jungui, a Hui Muslim, who was the last of a disappearing breed in Lanzhou. Today Luo is the only individual in Lanzhou who is master of the art of making and operating a skin raft. These rafts, which were sometimes constructed from as many as 400 inflated sheepskins bound to a wooden frame, used to be floated all the way to Baotao in Inner Mongolia. Luo's raft consisted of fourteen sheepskins. We travelled on it a short distance down the Yellow River. Bridges spanning the Yellow River and motorized boats had made Luo's raft ferry obsolete, although it was again in demand owing to a

fresh influx of curious tourists. For a fee, he would demonstrate to them his skill with his raft.

From Lanzhou we drove north towards Ningxia, the smallest and one of the poorest provinces of China. Because the majority of the population were Hui, Ningxia was called a Hui Autonomous Region, like Xinjiang for the Uygur, Xizang for the Tibetans, Niumonggu for the Mongols and Guangxi for the Zhuang.

We saw few vehicles along the road as we entered some arid loess country. Along some stretches, the road had all but disappeared. Surprisingly at a roadside

73 At Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia Autonomous Region, a girl works a huge loom weaving a wool carpet with a traditional design.







Many women patients prefer not to be examined by male doctors. We asked Dr Ma whether that was an attitude he had met. 'Not in the city. But in the countryside and the mountain region to the south, they are fundamentalists and even for an injection or inoculation, they would cut a hole in their clothes to get it. In emergency cases, the man has to tear up his own clothes and cover the woman up before they can do anything. You know, older women still wear a partial veil in the mountain region,' Ma explained.

We asked some people about birth control policies and how it was affecting the Muslims. Our questions were soon answered when one middle-aged man

complained about the burden of having ten children.

At the university, we met Annie, a Hui professor of music. A nationally acclaimed singer in the 1960s, Annie described the use of the 'Kao-xuan' among Islamic women. It was a wind instrument made from bamboo, something like a mouth-organ in the shape of a comb and women wore it on their heads. 'Muslim women are forbidden to expose their hair to the sun and their faces to young men. So they always keep to themselves their feelings of happiness as well as sadness,' explained Annie. 'In the past, they were married off by the age of 13 or 14, so they used this instrument to voice their grievances.'

77 At the market of Kashgar, colourful saddles, bridles and other horse-related items are among the most sought-after merchandise.

78 (following pages) Along the fringes of the Taklimakan Desert in southern Xinjiang, horse and mule carts are common sights and widely used by the Uygurs for transportation.



Zhongwei was 400 kilometres from Lanzhou, and Yinchuan, the provincial capital, was another 200 kilometres away. For the last 100 kilometres, we finally found the black road. We were put up at a modern hotel and had an early meeting with Vice-President Wang Yensen of the autonomous region. He promised that our request to meet with intellectuals and professional Muslims would be granted.

Dr Ma Chengyi was deputy-director and a urologist at the provincial hospital. He was working on a disease which affected a lot of Hui people, something he called 'Mediterranean anaemia'. We asked about dying and the

Islamic belief in an afterlife. 'Hui people believe in an afterlife. When they die, they will go to heaven. After death, the body is cleansed, wrapped in white and a hole is dug in the ground for burial. The head to the north, the feet to the south, with the face turning west, towards Mecca.' 'You mean southwest,' We reminded him that we were now to the northeast of Mecca. 'But what about the Han?' We wanted to find out the difference. 'For Muslims who are going to die, they always want to go back to their homes and die there. But for the Han, they die in the hospitals,' answered Dr Ma.

76 *Two Uygur jewellers of Kashgar crafting silver jewellery which includes rings, necklaces and earrings.*











