

SON

Society of Central Asian Needs



The Uygurs

Six million Muslim Uygurs live in China's Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region – an area larger than Alaska, and approximately 3 times the size of France (660,000 sq. miles). There are almost 240,000 Uygurs in the Soviet Union with small numbers of expatriates in such diverse places as Australia, West Germany, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Morocco, Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the U.S.A.¹ As far as is now known, there is no indigenous Uygur church either in their homeland in Xinjiang, in the Soviet Union or amongst the expatriates. There are no Uygur-language Gospel radio broadcasts. There is not a single Gospel portion available for distribution amongst the majority of the Uygur population in China. Indeed, a new translation of the Gospel of Mark has been

printed, but it is the Cyrillic script for Soviet Uygurs making it unreadable for the majority of Uygurs in China. In fact, until recently, even tourists have not been allowed to visit the Tarim Basin in southern Xinjiang where most of the Uygur population lives.

The situation of an almost total absence of Christian witness has not always been the case. Twice before there has been a living church amongst the Uygurs: once the result of Nestorian missionary activity; and more recently (1892-1938) through the work of Swedish evangelicals.² But, both of these movements have almost been totally eradicated.³ Several Uygur Christians succeeded in escaping from their homeland in the 1930's, but there is no indication that they regrouped to form an ongoing expatriate fellowship

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or, indeed, whether there were enough of them to form a substantial fellowship. One estimate is that no more than half a dozen, if that many, made it out to India or to other places.⁴

One of the Uygur Christian refugees contacted Chinese Christians in Kansu, telling them the story of imprisonment, torture and execution of Uygur believers in Kaski (Kashgar) and other oasis towns. "His hearers were greatly moved, and resolved that Chinese Christians must now take on the responsibility for becoming missionaries to Turkestan, and the 'Back to Jerusalem Movement' in China owed much of its inspiration to Simon's story."⁵

It is hard to say how much of that original missionary vision, held by these Chinese Christians, still remains after the war with Japan, the Civil War and the Cultural Revolution. One cannot help but think that Christians with such a burning zeal to reach non-Chinese for Jesus would be the special targets of Red Guard fury. But God has His ways of protecting a movement that is genuinely from Him. It has been reported that a number of house fellowships of Chinese Christians are meeting in Xinjiang and 12 Fellowships in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region. It is doubtful if any of the believers in these fellowships are connected with the former 'Back to Jerusalem Movement' or if they are reaching Uygurs for Christ. There are now at least 3,000 Protestants in Xinjiang. About 1,000 of these live in Urumqi.

History

We will not go in depth into the history of the Uygurs. Let us suffice to say that modern Uygurs derive their name from a steppe empire and a later oasis kingdom founded by people of that name. Their music and dancing greatly influenced the mainstream of Chinese performing arts during the Tang dynasty – the golden age of China. Uygur scribes, translators, interpreters, administrators and men of finance were the backbone of Mongol imperial power. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Western explorers returned from Xinjiang reporting the discovery of ancient manuscripts in over a dozen languages testifying to the amazing cultural cross-fertilization which has characterised Xinjiang since time immemorial. In the latter part of the 19th century and the first seven and a half decades of the 20th, the Uygurs have had a difficult time. The area has often been convulsed by civil war and religious, political and racially motivated strife. The rebellion of Yakub Beg (1864-1877), the Dungan (Hui) insurrection of Big Horse (1931-1934), the iron reign of Sheng Shih-tsai (1933-1944), the Chinese civil war and the Cultural Revolution (1965-1969), and the influence of the Gang of Four (till 1976) are all part of the Uygurs' more recent legacy.

Now a cautious hope seems to pervade Xinjiang: the excesses of the radicals are apparently a part of the past.

Uygur Ethos

The Uygurs are a proud, happy and independent people.⁶ Many work the Kariz-irrigated lands around the major oases – producing grains, cotton and fruits of fabled succulence. They have weathered countless devastations and still remain able to joke, sing and dance with consummate wit and skill. Perhaps the very brutality of the past and the harshness of their environment has taught them



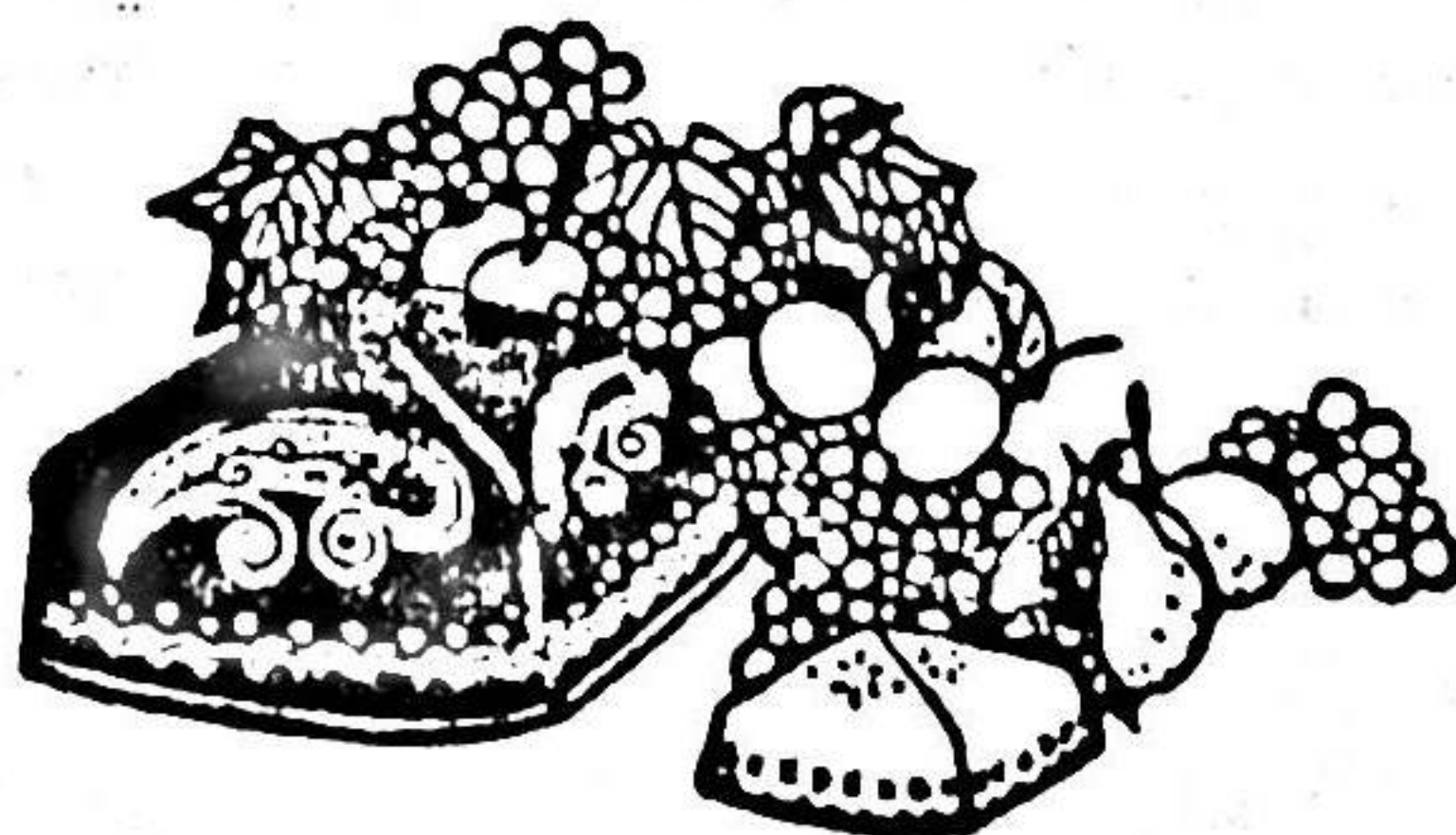
proportion and objectivity concerning themselves.

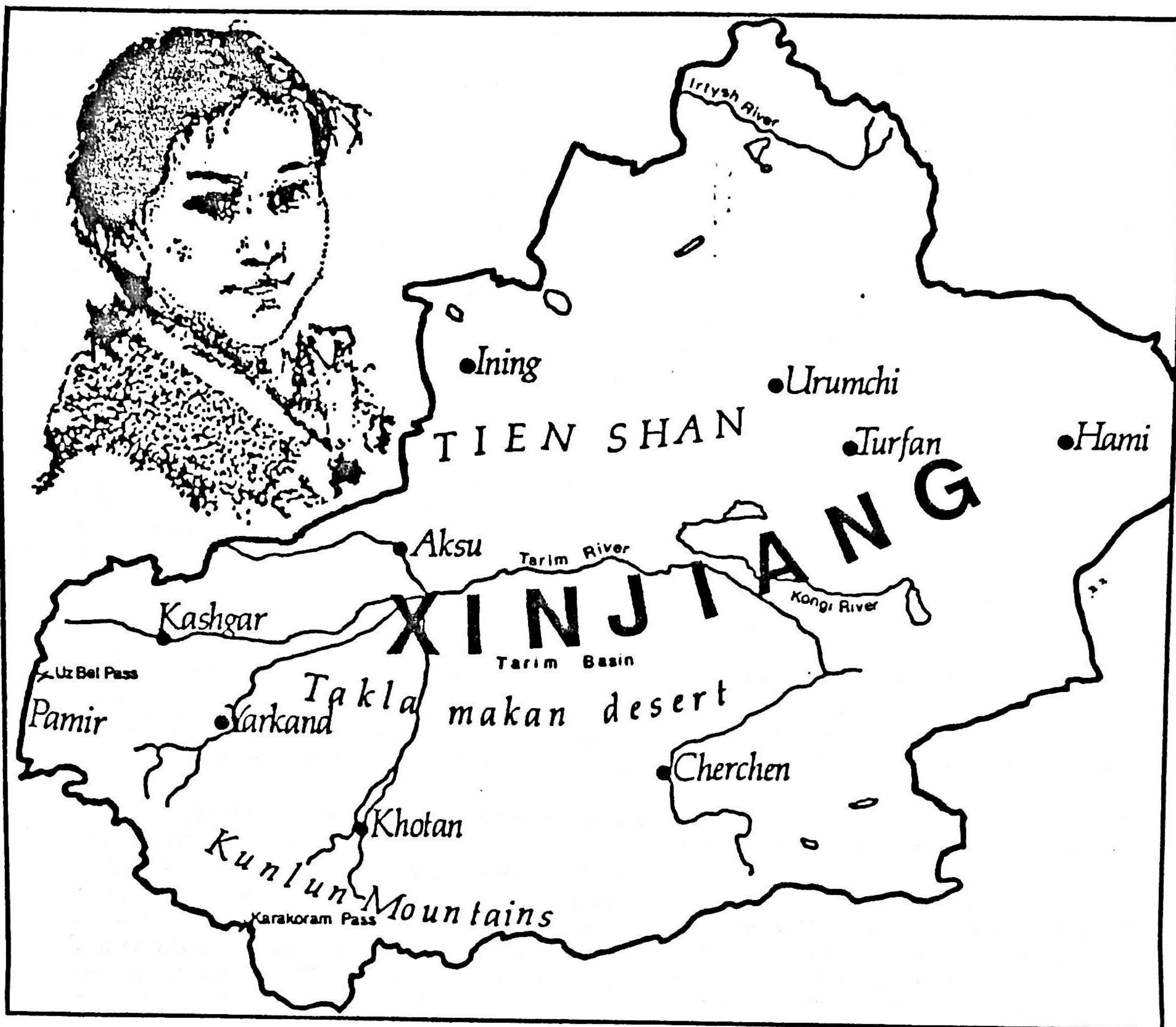
The charm of the Uygurs is partly ascribable to their unique blend of cultural sophistication – due to their crossroads contacts with so many cultures; and their rural simplicity – due to their geographical isolation. Indeed, their cosmos is a pivot point between some of the earth's most ancient and artistically refined cultures (India, China and Persia); yet, at the same time, their world is separated from these same civilisations by immense mountain ranges and vast deserts. To the rich music of the rawap, satar and tambourine – the same sort of instruments that charmed the emperors of the T'ang court – the Uygurs dance their Maxrap with the joy and abandon of children at play.⁷

Islam

According to tradition, the first Turkic ruler to accept Islam was a Khan of the Karakhanids who had his capital in Kashgar.⁸ By the 11th century, Islam had penetrated deeply into the oases of the Tarim Basin.⁹ However, despite the growing Islamic pressure, Buddhism continued to flourish well into the 15th century!

Although Islam took a comparatively long period of time to establish itself in East Turkestan, it is definitely the major factor, along with ethnicity, which sets off the local population from the Han Chinese. As in Western Turkestan, the graves of popular Muslim saints are still venerated.¹⁰ The number of working mosques is quoted by Mehut Amin, an official of the Religious Affairs Bureau in Xinjiang, as being 12,000, with 15,000 clergy and other functionaries.¹¹ At least 70,000 Korans (in Arabic) have been printed since the destructive days of the Gang of Four. These were printed not just for the Uygurs, but for all Chinese Muslims. They are on sale in the bazaars and outside mosques in Xinjiang, though the price is high, (25 Yuan, that is, approximately one month's income). There is now a great deal more religious freedom than during the Cultural Revolution. But, we must remember that Xinjiang is considered by the government to be a very integral (and indeed ever more closely integrated) part of territorial China. It is Chinese policy to tolerate religion as long as it survives, but the assumption is that it will eventually die.¹²





The Swedish Mission

Missionary candidates were carefully screened and came to Xinjiang for long-term commitments. For several unbroken decades the missionaries exercised a medical ministry of mercy, preached and taught in four major oasis cities, and perhaps most importantly, lived balanced Christian lives which were easily observable by the locals.¹³ The Swedes did not completely adapt their clothing and habits to the local customs, but they did not hold themselves aloof. Their houses were frequently filled with visitors and guests.

Perhaps it was because the missionary candidates were so well selected that there was such a high degree of spiritual maturity and genuine unity among the workers on the field as seems to have been the case. They met once a year from the four cities where the 25 to 30 of them were stationed. They seemed to be deeply committed to one another in prayer and mutual support, and they allowed each other considerable freedom of conscience and the freedom to apply the Gospel as each saw fit. Yet, this did not prevent them from engaging in vigorous and sometimes warm debate as to methodology and approach.

The Swedes were underrated, practical men and women, many of whom came from humble farming or middle class backgrounds. Their hard work, their joyful family life and their genuine concern for their neighbours, gradually won the respect of the Uygurs. They came with no predetermined missionary strategy. The medical work, for example, developed only after the sick came to them to ask for help.

If one were to give the secret of the Swede's success – perhaps one could say it was their consistent witness in deed and word over a long period of time. The mission lasted for 46 years (1892-1938). For example, Ali Akhond, who later became an effective evangelist, was won only after quite a few years of close observation and contact with the missionaries. Let us listen to his own testimony:

"For long I could not bring myself to believe what they (the missionaries) said. After some eighteen years' acquaintance, about 1335-6 A.H. by the will of God through Our Saviour, when the second wing of the hospital was being built, I entered the service of Mr Högberg, and worked there. I listened to a great many more sermons on the Gospel and began to understand it a little. So some ten more years passed, and then I said to myself, 'If I go on living here some evil may come of it,' and then I was afraid and I went away. During the next years I thoroughly examined the Muslims and watched the deeds that were produced by their religion, and I also watched to see what deeds the religion of the Christians produced, until I felt I really knew them both. Then I said to myself, 'This will not do, I cannot longer refrain from becoming a Christian'. So I accepted salvation, and when I had been baptized my heart received peace."¹⁴

Because the mission did persevere for so long, there was undoubtedly a snowball effect – a gaining of momentum over the years. One here, one there began coming to Christ. Despite the inevitable harassments, the newly baptized believers gradually began to form the nucleus of an indigenous Christian presence. These young men and

women could witness to their fellow countrymen with greater clarity and force than the missionaries themselves.

Ali Akhond, for example, graphically contextualised Gospel narratives to his audiences:

*"... when he preached on the Story of the Prodigal, he could make everyone see the handsome young Bey in a striped silk coat, white turban and crimson leather boots riding away from his father's house on a fine Badakhshani stallion. They followed his adventures until he had fallen so low that he kept pigs for Chinese idolaters to eat, and at last came creeping back, even poorer than members of the guild of the beggars of Kashgar, and they watched the joyful welcome of his return."*¹⁵

Besides the effective preaching and personal evangelism of Ali Akhond and others, another significant development was the leadership training ministry of another convert, Yusuf Ryehan. Yusuf was more immune from local harassment than the other indigenous leaders because he was originally from India, the son of a prominent Shi'ite Muslim, and carried a British passport.

In 1931, Yusuf went to Shache (Yarkand) and formed a band of Christian young men. In 1933, the leader of his group, Habil, an intelligent and highly responsible young man of 19, was shot by the guards of Emil Abdullah after refusing to recant his faith.

A young Swedish nurse who arrived in Shache shortly after Habil's death wrote:

*"I was glad to become acquainted with the Christians there; I knew how hard a time the little congregation had just been through, and the young Christians especially, some of them still in their teens, filled me with admiration. They had already been in prison and suffered for their faith. They had been tempted with offers of good jobs and other advantages if they would give up being Christians. Nevertheless they had come back to take their share in serving Christ and the mission. It was a joy to see them, to hear them singing at the services in church, and when their turn came to speak they were not ashamed to witness to their faith."*¹⁶

The church grew in the four cities until there were at least 300 adult communicants before it was finally dispersed by the second major persecution in 1938.



A Word to Tentmakers

"Because Islam took root before the Chinese subdued the local tribes, the present Communist regime views it as indigenous. By contrast, it treats Christianity as a religion imported by foreign missionaries."¹⁷

This claim that Christianity, unlike Islam, is not an indigenous religion, is not wholly true. Indeed, the present day Christianity in Xinjiang had its roots in foreign missionary activities in the last century and the first half of this century, but the present day church is very much a self-supporting, self-propagating venture which can truly be called indigenous (at least indigenous to the Han Chinese living in Xinjiang). Whether or not the authorities consider Christianity to be indigenous, they are against "any foreign religious organizations or persons" interfering in either Christian or Muslim affairs.

This sensitivity concerning outside interference goes back to a Chinese phobia of Western imperialist intervention, an aversion that has existed for a long time but which was strengthened all the more after the Revolution of 1949.

Missionary activity is associated in the minds of many Chinese leaders with China's humiliation in colonial days. Indeed, the contributions of missionaries in education and health care were appreciated, but all too often foreign Gospel workers were considered as part of the West's overall colonial policy.

Particularly annoying are any attempts by foreign Christians to prolong or extend the influence of indigenous Chinese Christianity which the party believes will die a slow (if prolonged) natural death in the face of universal education, improvement in living standards and socialist progress.

We, as Christians, can learn a valuable lesson from Wong How-Man, a talented Los Angeles based journalist who has just published a 50 page article (text and photographs) in the March 1984 National Geographic, entitled, "Peoples of China's Far Provinces". After travelling extensively in China on a number of trips, he wrote: "I was aware that the Chinese authorities always saw what I published, but they continued to allow me into the country. From that I learned a valuable lesson: The government of the People's Republic of China will tolerate honest criticism, but not what it regards as prejudice."

The house churches in Xinjiang are made up almost exclusively of Han Chinese. These believers have the greatest potential for reaching out to the Uygurs and some might even be doing so already. Certainly, they are permanent residents there and can provide a long-term evangelistic witness, such as no tentmakers could hope to achieve. However, these local Christians are at present the greatest obstacle to effective evangelism of the Uygurs; just because they are Chinese, with their overwhelming Chinese ethnocentrism and their complete ignorance of the Uygur language and ways. The Uygurs, who themselves are a proud race with an ancient culture, can only be expected to respond to the Gospel when it is brought by humble messengers who have taken the effort to learn their language and culture. Chinese Christians need to be taught the elementary principles of cross-cultural evangelism: the necessity of language learning, cultural adaptation and the renouncing of feelings of cultural or ethnic superiority. They also need motivating to reach out to the Uygurs.

Only then will they be accepted and appreciated by the Uygurs and the Gospel can be received within a Uygur context, instead of being seen as yet another false religion of the idolatrous Han Chinese immigrants encroaching on their land. Apart from any direct ministry which tent-makers might be able to have among the Uygurs, they should seek to encourage the outreach of the Chinese Christians and, especially, train them in cross-cultural evangelism.

It would be a shame and a great tragedy were Christ to be presented to the Uygurs as a proud Chinese teacher, instead of the true Middle-Eastern Jesus with whom the Uygurs can so naturally identify. Just as Peter and the other leaders of the first century church needed to be taught that Gentiles can have their sins forgiven by faith in Christ, without first becoming Jewish proselytes, so the Han Chinese believers need to be taught that Uygurs are best reached in a Uygur cultural setting and do not need to renounce any of their national identity or adopt Chinese ways in order to become followers of Jesus. If, on the other hand, the Chinese Christians treat the Uygurs as barbarians who need civilising and expect them to learn Chinese language and culture, the progress of the Gospel will be permanently hindered – and we will only have ourselves to blame for the eternal condemnation of six million Uygurs.

Highlights from a recent trip to Xinjiang.

● URUMQI

The City

Urumqi appears like most other Chinese cities – an arrangement of large concrete blocks, smokestacks and factories. This scene is only mitigated by the snow-capped Tian Shan mountains visible to the south. Many travellers have thus been very dismissive of Urumqi. However, several days of exploration especially down the back-streets in the southern part of the city revealed that strange Islamic world we had come in search of. Even near

the hotel we came across a busy Uygur market selling melons, sheep heads, tempting shish kebab and various aromatic spices. A mile walk downtown took us to another market. Arabic sounding music was grinding forth from ancient speakers. A large banner lured customers into a gruesome freak show to see dwarves, giants and deformed foetuses. A young man squatting in the dust was giving his trade patter to sell anti-worm pills. To emphasize the point, lurid pictures of their ravages on human intestines were laid out on the ground, and to cap it all, bottles of large white worms, preserved in spirit. Behind all this activity, bearded Uygur men in embroidered square caps were making 'nang', the local bread, in open clay ovens. First, a blob of dough is rolled flat, a thicker edging formed, and the centre decoratively pricked. The mixture is then stuck on the inside wall of the oven, to be retrieved dextrously a couple of minutes later, hot, crunchy, fluffy and delicious.

Mosques

Everywhere there are mosques. Some large and gaily painted. Others small and in ill-repair. Many are being repainted and renovated, and there is no doubt in our minds that Islam is enjoying a renaissance after the dark days of the Cultural Revolution.

The mosque in the centre of town was packed out with worshippers. Many could not get inside the courtyard, so they layed out their prayer-mats on the pavement, with Chinese cyclists passing behind their backs, only inches away. Across the street several Muslim women and children squatted on the pavement. Some of them appeared to be begging for alms. After the worship service we talked with one or two of the worshippers who could speak Chinese, as several hundred men poured out of the mosque.

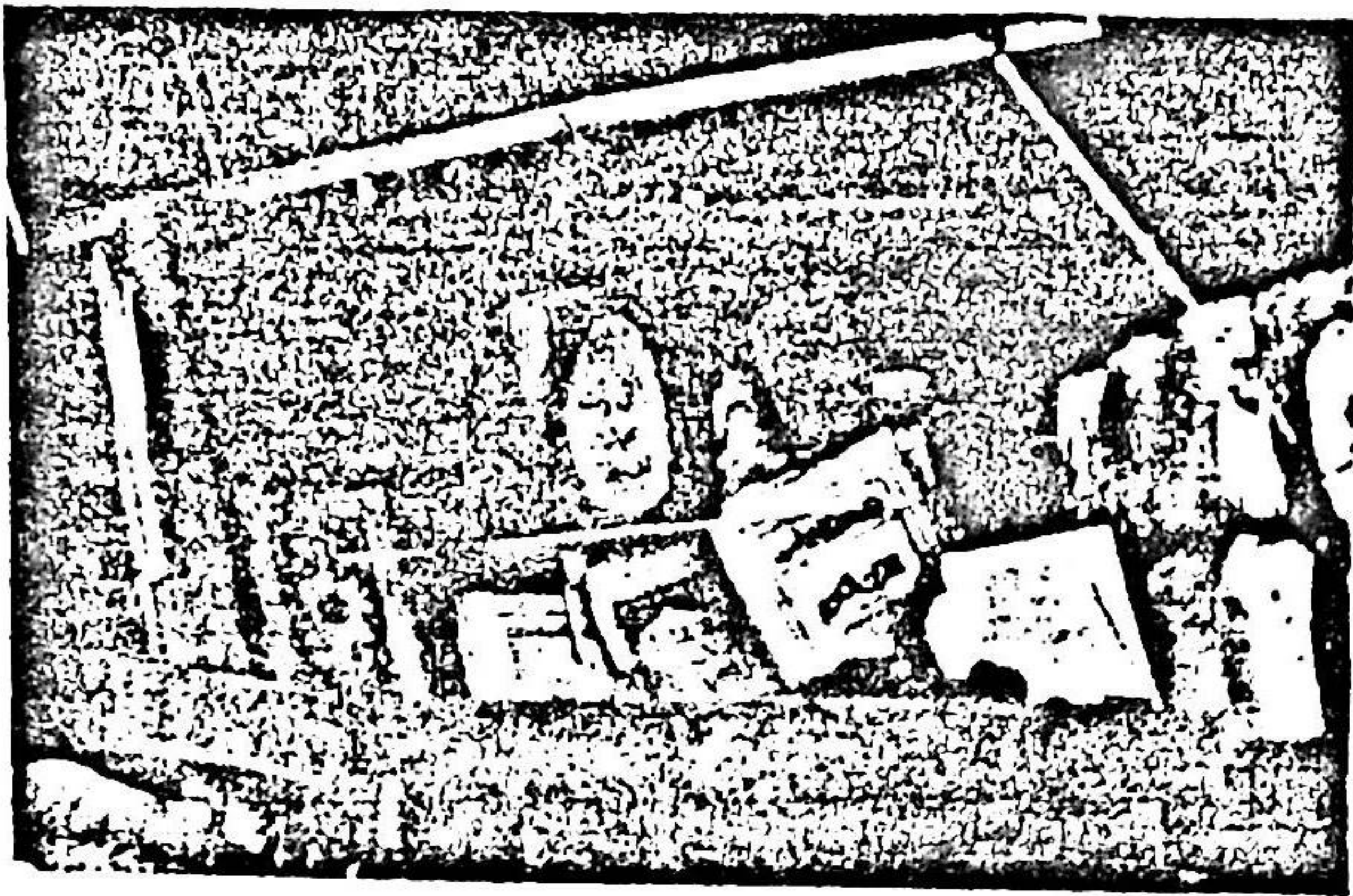
During the autumn of 1984 about 1,000 Muslims were allowed to go on the pilgrimage to Mecca, the largest contingent since 1949, according to Peking Review of 17th September 1984, but still only a tiny percentage of those who desire to go. A large number of these Muslims didn't actually get any further than Rawalpindi in Pakistan for they missed the plane which should have taken them to



Mecca. At first a large number refused to return to China but after a number of months stay in Pakistan all agreed to return to China.

To enable them to join this pilgrimage they had sold their fields and other property and travelled through China for four months. Most of them were either farmers or shopkeepers and had to travel 7,000 km. within China.

First of all they had to travel to Urumqi to obtain permission to leave China. Then they had to go to Peking for a visa to enter Pakistan. After obtaining the visa they had to return to Urumqi to collect their passports. The trip into Pakistan took them through the Himalayas and that alone took them a month. Much of the journey was done on foot. From Kashgar the government provided them with buses to take them to Rawalpindi. This just begins to reveal the determination and zeal of the Muslims in China.



Islamic Bookstall

Along the main street – Liberation Road – we found another mosque. There was an Islamic bookstall at the entrance. Copies of the Koran printed by the Chinese Islamic Association (the official watchdog organisation) were next to pre-1949 second-hand copies, and even tatty leather bound copies of the Islamic scriptures, and commentaries, dating back a century or more. What was most surprising, however, was the amount of crudely mimeographed Islamic booklets printed locally in Xinjiang. All were freely for sale to any passer by – a far cry from the situation for Christians.



Friendly Homes

While walking down a side-lane, a friendly Uygur woman welcomed us into her home. The main part of the one storey mud-brick dwelling consisted of two rooms. The first had an oven, with a high raised platform for sitting, and probably sleeping. The second was the guest room. The table was piled high with New Year sweet-meats and cakes. Several decorated chests containing bedding were

stacked around the walls, and there were one or two dressers displaying ornaments and family photographs. Everything was very clean. We drank tea, and awaited the husband's return from the mosque, and from visiting the family tomb. Eventually he arrived with more of the children, and we were surprised to learn that there were six in all. The strict birth control policy enforced among the Han Chinese had not been implemented among the national minorities, although we were later told that at present no more than two or three children are encouraged. A relative arrived, and the lamb tethered outside was ritually slain.

Although our new found friends spoke Uygur, they also knew some Chinese, so we presented them with a Gospel booklet. After taking a family photograph, we took our leave, warmed by their friendliness.

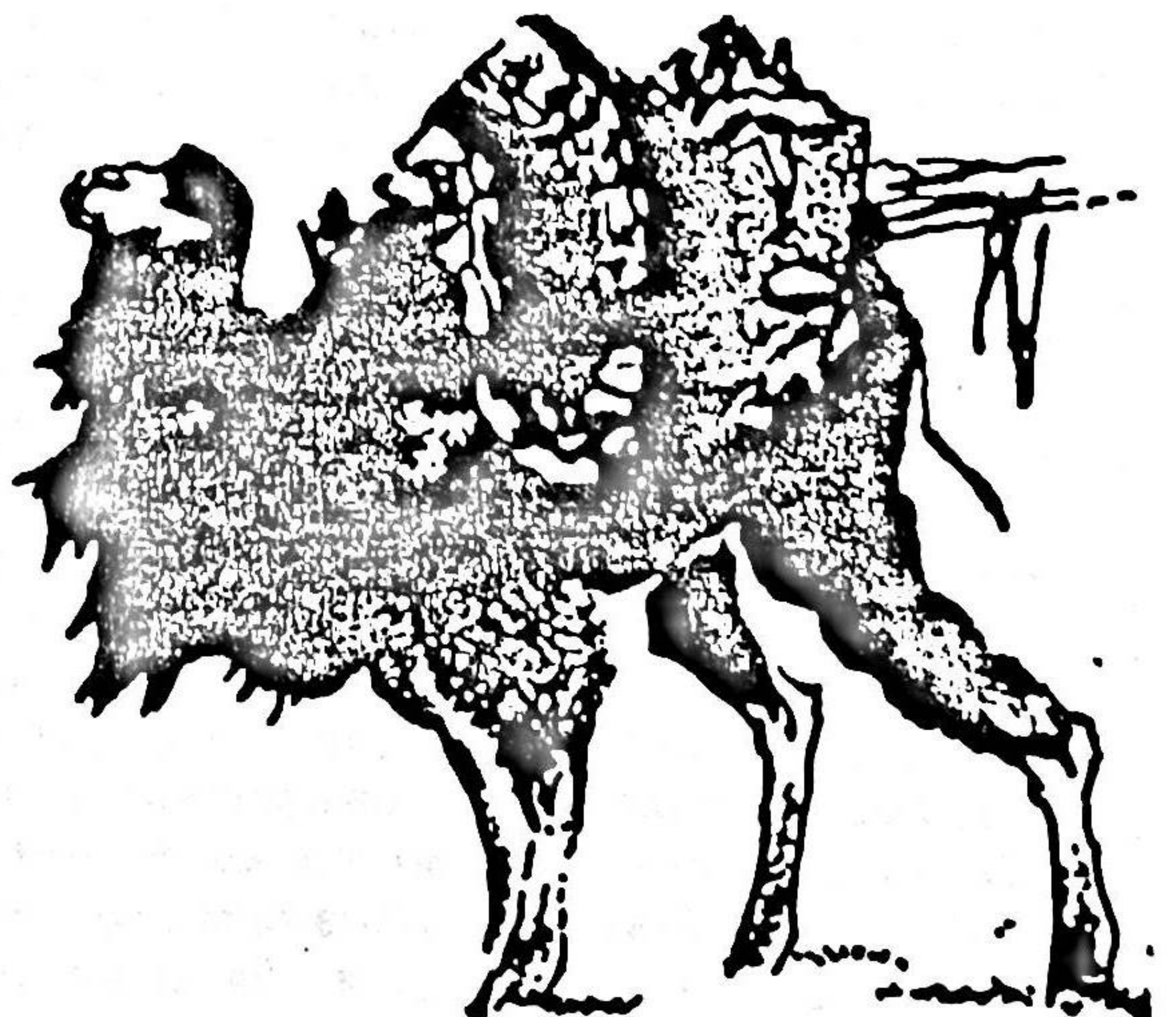
A little later, we were invited into yet another home, this time by a Hui Chinese Muslim. The ladies in the family wore the typical, small, white caps of the Hui. They only spoke Chinese and had adapted many Chinese ways. This man was very open to the Gospel. At first he maintained that Christianity and Islam were 'the same' as both promote good living. This presented us with a wonderful opportunity to share the Gospel of free grace, and to talk of Jesus, the sin-bearer. He listened very quietly, and afterwards we were able to pray with him. He gladly accepted a New Testament in Chinese.

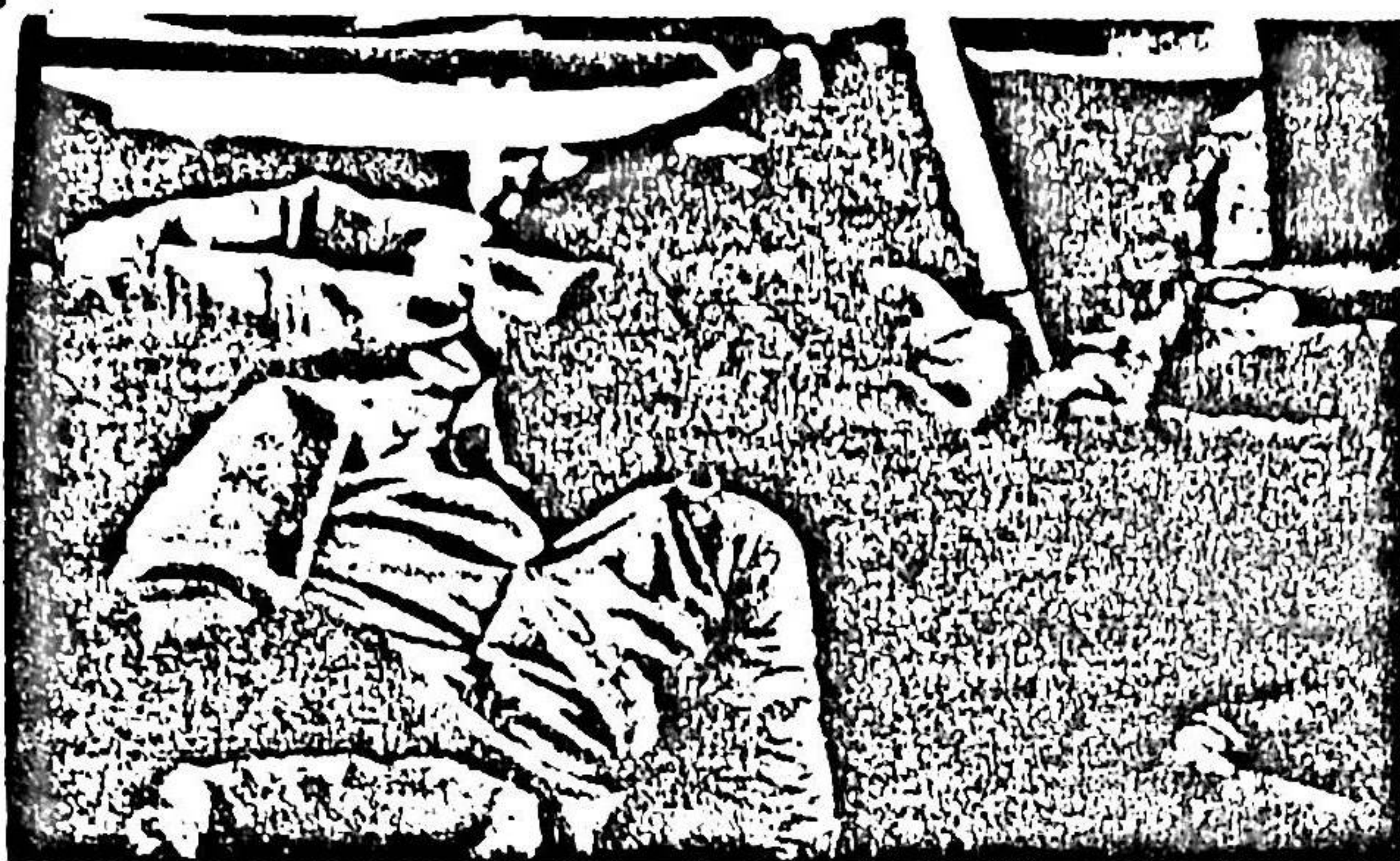
●KASHGAR

Arrival

Our arrival in Kashgar was hardly happy. The plane landed at a tiny airstrip in the middle of the desert. There were no taxis to the centre of town several miles away. However, as we waited for the airport bus to arrive, we were aware that we had arrived at the very far edge of the People's Republic to an area which may be politically under Chinese control, but in every other way is Central Asian. Through the noon heat haze a white Muslim tomb could be seen in the distance – the only object to stand out against the monotony of stones and sand, with grey, faint mountains fading to the horizon. Under a parched tree a few Uygur women and children sat patiently, trying to sell grapes and melons. A scrawny donkey was tethered nearby.

Eventually we set off along what may be called an absence of road, to Kashgar. The bus lurched round pot-holes sending clouds of dust and sand into the air.





On arrival in the city no one was around, and although our watches said it was three o'clock, we realised that everyone in fact kept local time and we had arrived bang in the middle of the *xiuxi* (siesta) period.

The City

As we travelled through Kashgar it was as if we had stepped back in time one hundred, five hundred or even one thousand years. Or as if we had stumbled into some mediaeval Arabian or biblical city? Everywhere one and two-storey mud-brick, sand-coloured houses lined the dusty tracks which served as roads. A large mosque with delicate crescent-topped minarets looked down over a busy street market. Piles of melons of every description were being sold by bearded men and head-scarved women sitting under large white awnings.

As we walked through the streets the mediaeval, middle-eastern atmosphere of the city struck us at every turn. There was a man rhythmically beating a glowing piece of iron into a horseshoe held steady by his assistant. Next door, another man was beating sheets of old metal taken from oil-drums and other scrap into cooking stoves. The clink of hammers on anvils punctuated the rumbling of the carts and the scratchy Arabic-type music emanating from ancient loudspeakers. The carters shouted, "Bosht! Bosht!" (Make way!) especially when their frightened horses or donkeys veered away from the occasional passing camel.

Each street or quarter had its own particular trade. There were men sitting making the beautiful Uyghur four-corner embroidered caps. There were different designs, even for men, with green perhaps predominating. Women often wore gold, or purple ornamented with sequins. Another section of the town sold highly decorated daggers. The hilts were ornamented with glass, and the blades inscribed in the graceful Uyghur Arabic-script.

As we walked or rode through the streets the children an alongside us shouting, "Bye-Bye!" Many of them were very dirty, and the little boys



often ran naked, and rolled in the dust. Not surprisingly some had eye diseases and sores all around their mouths. Hygiene appeared non-existent, and sanitation was of the most primitive kind. Cholera, and we heard even the bubonic plague, occasionally break out.

Little boys trundled the streets pushing water carts. They would fill up the oil-drum with water from a nearby ditch and then they would trot off to the local tea-house or wherever it was required. Chunks of meat hung on hooks at the butchers' stalls collecting flies. There were even calves and sheeps' heads on sale, next to fly-infested entrails – all laid out on a mat in the dust.

The Mosque

Kashgar appears to be a wholly Islamic city. Many of the women wear brown veils hiding their heads and shoulders. But appearances can be deceptive so we decided to visit the city's mosques to find out. Kashgar's largest mosque – which can hold 10,000 people – is called the Id Kah Mosque. Its brightly green and yellow painted exterior (refurbished at government expense) conceals a large, but nondescript open courtyard with covered area for worship at the end. Near the entrance there was running water for worshippers to perform their preparatory ritual ablutions, and there were small rooms around the edge of the courtyard where the imams kept their books and clothes.



On Friday the scene amazed us. The covered worship area was soon full, and gradually the whole of the courtyard filled with men unrolling their prayer-mats. We estimated that there were at least 5 or 6 thousand worshippers. The ritual washing pool was thronged with men carrying pottery jugs preparing for worship.

All then hastened to get a place at the front of the mosque. Latecomers unrolled their mats under their trees, and we were gradually pushed closer to the back.

Even young boys were prostrating themselves in imitation of their elders. We were struck with the solemnity of the occasion and the genuine reverence displayed.

The heart of Kashgar was unveiled before our eyes. Here was traditional Islam, majestic, unhurried, seemingly as solid as a rock. All over the city, dozens of other mosques, large and small were doubtless equally crowded with worshippers. Thirty-five years of communism seems hardly to have made a dent in Islam in Kashgar. Young and old prostrated themselves before Allah the Ineffable. Yet it seemed to us that these people were prostrating themselves to an unknown God with whom they have no personal relationship. We prayed silently that somehow the Gospel of Christ would come in all its light, love and joy to these people.

Marxist Ideology

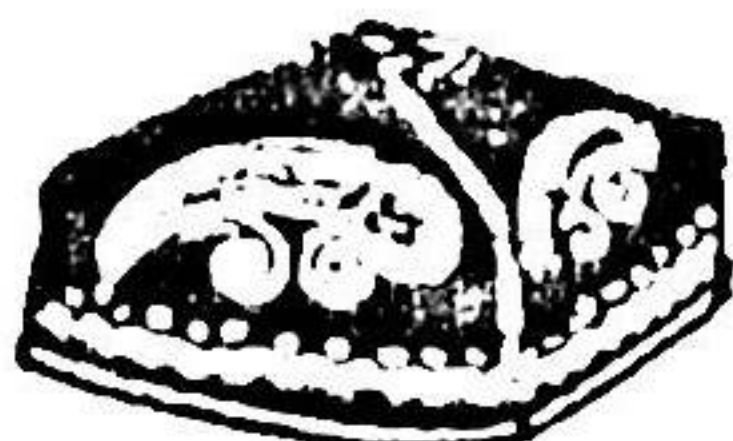
In the modern part of the city a huge statue of Mao faces the entrance to the park, hand outstretched. It is visible from many parts of the city. Its incongruity is almost farcical. Kashgar goes about its business oblivious of marxist ideology. At the main mosque we mentioned to a Chinese-speaking Muslim that the Muslims here seemed to have a greater amount of freedom than before. "Comparatively," was the reply; he then agreed that the situation was much better than in Soviet Central Asia where only a few mosques are open in the whole region.

He was then asked if the Red Guards had destroyed the mosques during the Cultural Revolution. "They didn't dare!" was his reply. And it stands to reason that a few fanatical Red Guards would probably have been cut to pieces by the majority, outraged Muslim populace if they had attempted to desecrate the mosques. As far as we could see, Kashgar had few of the fading Cultural Revolution slogans which can still be seen faintly on walls in other places all over China.

On the surface the local people seem to enjoy a real degree of autonomy. Most of the policemen, for instance, were Uygur, and could not speak Chinese. However, it was noticeable that officials in the hotels and banks were mainly Han Chinese, and doubtless, ultimate control rests firmly in Chinese hands.

The green oasis of Kashgar rests in the wastes of the Taklimakan Desert. The people of Kashgar need to know the true God found only in Christ Jesus so that they can have real meaning and a purpose for existence. We hope the people of Kashgar will remain etched in our memories and prayers for a long time to come; elderly, hook nosed men in Uygur caps, veiled women moving silently through the market, and dirty children frolicking in the ever-present dust.

Love Poems



The following are two simple love songs.¹⁸ The reader's imagination is allowed to do with him what it may – after all, poetic licence is granted to the reader as well as to the poet!

The bridge, draped in freshly woven Khotan silk, waits anxiously for the "lover's knock." Dormant within the heart of God's elect amongst the Uygurs lies a deep love for Jesus, which, when awoken, will sparkle like a diamond of fire in the black oasis sky. This love has been kindled before and it will ignite again as surely as Jesus' faithful promises to His Beloved.

Past Your Door

*I went past your door
and the sound of your tambourine
came to my ears; and the rustle
of your skirts came like a spring
wind, fanning the flame of my love.*

Eyebrows

*Please open your door so I
might slip in on to your k'ang
finding on it a loveliness like
the newest moon, thick eyebrows
capable of so deep a love, and eyes
that sparkle like the stars through
the night.*



*Brother, you have been gone for years.
Nevertheless,
In our hearts you are forever around us.*

*Like a branch of beautiful, fresh plum
you scattered wafts of heavenly fragrance
in the midst of a severe winter,
where every creature has fallen
and all grasses have withered.
In the depth of a spacious, lonesome, solitary,
and dark night,
you radiated a beam of the Truth,
like a bright morning star.*

*Although it is years since you left us,
we still remember and reflect on you constantly.
We will never forget those difficult and distress-
ing years.
The image of your brilliance and determination
is engraved on our hearts forever and ever.*

XINJIANG – BASIC FACTS

Area:	1,600,000 sq. kms. (China's largest province)
Population:	13,082,000 consisting of:-
Uygurs	5,900,000 (Muslim)
Han Chinese	5,434,000 (about 5,000 Prot. & RC Christians)
Kazakhs	900,000 (Muslim)
Hui (Chinese Muslims)	570,000 (Muslim)
Mongols	110,000 (Buddhist)
Kirghiz	110,000 (Muslim)
Xibe	27,000 (Lama Buddhist, Shamanism)
Tajiks	26,000 (Muslim)
Uzbeks	12,000 (Muslim)
Manchu	9,000 (Muslim)
Daur	4,300 (Shamanism, Lama Buddhist)
Tatars	4,000 (Muslim)
Russians	2,000 (some orthodox Christians)



Conclusions.

1. China's 20 million Muslims constitute one of the largest unreached people groups in the world.

2. Apart from 7 million Chinese-speaking Muslims the rest need to be reached in their own languages.

3. In Xinjiang, 6 million Uygurs form a distinct community with their own language and culture. There are also smaller communities of Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, etc. also with their own language and traditions, and all are unreached.

4. Uygur, using the modern Arabic script, is definitely the "lingua Franca" among the Muslim peoples of Xinjiang. Chinese is poorly understood, if at all. To reach Xinjiang Muslims, a high priority should be placed on providing scriptures and Christian literature, and eventually Gospel broadcasts in Uygur.

5. The Han Chinese Church in Xinjiang has grown ten-fold since 1949 but faces formidable obstacles in reaching out to the Muslims.

6. Overseas there is an urgent need to focus Christian attention on these unknown peoples.

Prayer.

1. The prophet Daniel wrote that "those who turn many to righteousness" are "like the stars for ever and ever."
2. Call in your friends and intercede mightily that the blood of the Uygur believers will not have been shed in vain.
3. By our intercession, by our giving, or by our going, let's form a galaxy of lights over Xinjiang, who are turning many to righteousness.

Major prayer points

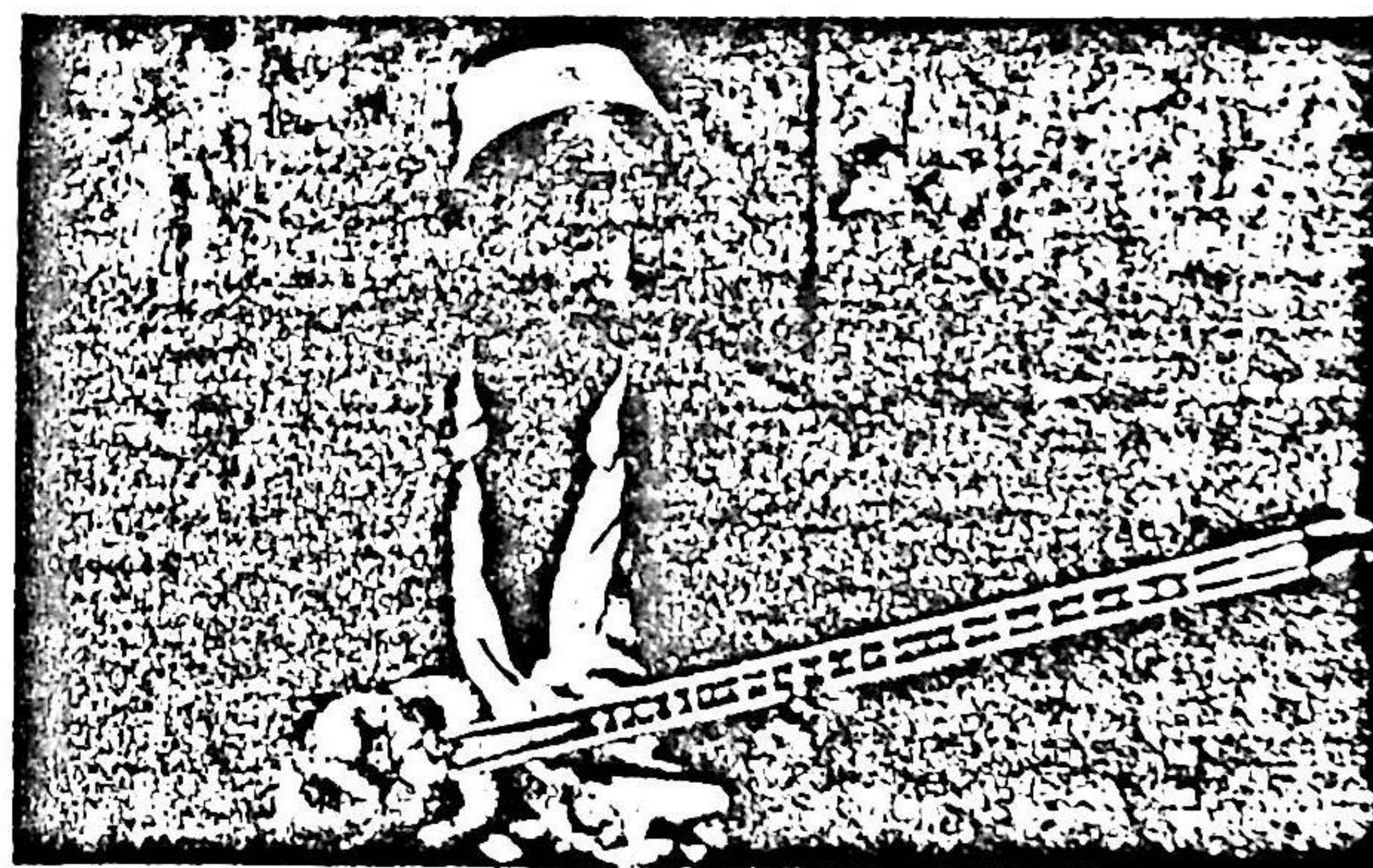
Pray that:-

1. ... God will give a vision and a burden to Han Chinese house-church Christians for the Muslims.

2. ...that suitable people can be found to produce Christian literature and radio programmes in Uygur and other minority languages.

3. ... That overseas Christians will be raised up to master Uygur and study Muslim religion and culture.

4. ... That God will plant a nucleus of a strong Bible-based Church amongst the Uygurs and other Muslims in China.



Footnotes

¹ The official Chinese spellings of 'Uygur' (more or less pronounced We-go) and 'Xinjiang' are used throughout (except where another source is directly quoted).

The Uygurs are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school. They are a Turkic people, particularly closely related to the Uzbeks linguistically and culturally.

² Kashi (Kashgar), the principal cultural centre of the Uygurs, was the site of a Nestorian metropolitan who had six to twelve bishops associated with him! In fact, along with Samarkand and three other cities, Kashi was considered one of the principal metropolitan sees of Further Asia. The late Dr. Mingana of the John Rylands Library, Manchester, was of the opinion that, at one time, the majority of the Uygurs were Christians. (Stewart: 137, 151).

Stewart (pp. 148-151) refers to a Rabban Sauma, a Uygur Nestorian priest from Peking. (Neil feels he could also have been an Ongut Turk, pp. 123-126), who made an official mission to Constantinople and Rome as ambassador of Argun, the Mongol Il Khan of Persia. Rabban Sauma met with the College of Cardinals in Rome and with King Philip in Paris and celebrated the Eucharist at Bordeaux in the presence of Edward I of England! At first, "It was inconceivable to (the Cardinals) that any (theologically) orthodox Christian could live without conscious fellowship with the Bishop of Rome. To this Sauma tartly replied: 'No man has come to us Orientals from the Pope. The Holy Apostles,

whose names I have mentioned, taught us the Gospel, and to what they have delivered us we have clung until the present day!"

- 3 There is no known Nestorian church today in Xinjiang or in any part of Central Asia.

After the persecution of 1937 only a few Christians were released from prison after severe punishment. The Nestorians and the Svenska Missionsförbundet were the only two full-blown missions to the Uygurs. George Hunter and other C.I.M.'ers had contact with the Uygurs, but it appears that no fellowships developed out of them.

Francesca French in her *Desert Journal* mentions meeting a baptized Muslim near Turfan or Hami (whether Uygur or Hui is uncertain), who was standing firm despite almost complete social ostracism.

- 4 The Swedish Mission moved to India in August 1938. As for the possibility of the re-forming of a Uygur Christian fellowship, see Hultvall, pp. 219-222.

- 5 Wingate: 'Mission,' p. 20. In the 1930's a Mark Ma, of Hui (Chinese Muslim) background, was part of the Back to Jerusalem Band which had as its vision to spread the Gospel to the 7 northwestern Chinese provinces and 7 nations of the Middle East. At least one Chinese mission couple went out into the Kansu Corridor in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. A report from the 60's mentioned a work in Xinjiang which sounded similar to the Back to Jerusalem Band. A large number of Chinese Christians in the diaspora know about the Back to Jerusalem Band or similar groups such as the Northwest Spiritual Workers' League.

- 6 "Most Turkis (i.e. Uygurs) are of an independent, generous and gay disposition, and their traditional way of life has many enviable features. In Islam there is a fundamental sense of the equality of all men before God which gives self-respect and dignity, and the social graces of life are learnt and practised by all." (Wingate: *Steep Ascent*, p. 6,7).

"Turkis as a whole are possessed of a broad-minded tolerance, self-reliance, and dignity." (Wingate: 'Education,' p. 321).

- 7 Maxrap is an event or 'happening' which includes playing instruments, reciting, singing, games, acrobatics, dancing, eating, riddles - i.e. fun à-la-Uygur. Their food at such parties is no ordinary fare - even the Chinese recognise Uygur culinary prowess! Besides dumplings and noodle dishes, refreshments include Fabled Hami honey-dew melons, Ili apples, peaches, Kucha pears, and raisins with 70 percent sugar content from the widely known Turfan white seedless grape. A break from the dancing and fun can be had in a quiet corner of the porch under the dense grapevines which shield the guest from the fierce summer sun. One can sip green tea on a raised, finely carpeted platform while watching the continued whirl of dancing friends in their red, yellow, blue, white and black striped silk clothes.

- 8 The Karakhanids ruled from 992 until 1211. During this period lived two great lights of present-day Uygur cultural heritage: 1. Yusup Has Hajjip, poet and philosopher, author of *Knowledge of Happiness, Enjoyment and Wisdom*, a 13,290 line work dealing with the philosophy, literature, economics and politics of his day; and 2. Mahmet Kashgar, author of the *Great Turkic Dictionary*. (*Peking Review*, Vol. 26, No. 35, August 19, 1983, p. 30).

- 9 Sinor: *Inner Asia*, p. 234-235.

- 10 Veneration of Saints and the Sufi Brotherhood are mentioned by several observers. See Funnar Jarring (No. 5 in Bibliography) and Raquette (No. 10) for accounts of popular religious customs.

- 11 *Peking Review*, June 13, 1983, pp. 8-9, "More Mosques opened in China", and Christopher Wren, *International Herald Tribune*, July 17, 1983, p. 4, "Islam flourishes in China".

- 12 *Peking Review*, January 16, 1984, p. 4, "Religious Policy in Full Force".

- 13 The other cities were Shache (Yarkand), Yengisar (Yangi Hissar), and Hancheng. Yengisar and Shache are major oasis towns at some distance from Kashi. Hancheng is a small town in Kashi's rather immediate vicinity.

- 14 Wingate: *A Mission of Friendship*, p. 17. It was actually from an elderly Dutch Catholic Priest, Abbe Hendriks, that Ali Akhond first heard the Gospel. This old man of God was speaking to some students in the Kashgar market when Ali happened to come by and hear him say, "Yes, I shall never die." years later, when Ali first went to the Swedish Mission church, he heard with some astonishment the words of John "Verily, verily, I can say unto you, he who believes in me will never see death."

We mention this incident in order to call attention to the need for further inquiry into the role of modern Catholic missions in Xinjiang.

Latourette mentions the Scheutveld Fathers Mission which worked in Mongolia, Kansu and Xinjiang. Recruits came from all the diocese of Belgium and several diocese of Holland. So it is probable that Abbe Hendriks was with the Scheutfeld. By 1913 the Scheutfelds had 169 missionaries on the field with 43 Chinese priest associates.

Hultvall's map of mission stations in Xinjiang shows Catholic stations in Suiting, Kulja (Ili) and Urumqi - all in northern Xinjiang. But evidently individual missionaries worked in the south.

- 15 Wingate: *The Steep Ascent*, p. 12

- 16 Wingate: *Mission of Friendship*, p. 18.

- 17 *International Herald Tribune*, July 17, 1983, p.4.

- 18 Rewi Alley: *Folk Poems from China's Minorities*, pp. 132-133.

- 19 Yu Yang was a member of the Northwest Spiritual Workers' League, a Chinese Christian student group which had grown increasingly concerned with restrictions on Christian activity in the big cities and who decided to commit their lives to service in China's West. (*China and the Church Today*, Vol. 6, No. 2, March-April 1984, p. 2).



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Pray for the **UYGURS**
of Northwest CHINA



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