

*Cheng Jing Qi*

Since the introduction of Islam into China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), it has been embraced by people of Hui, Uighur, Kazakh and other ethnic groups. Many mosques have been built in the country, the earliest ones being built in the 14th century. These buildings form an important component of the architectural heritage of China, and testify to developed contacts and cultural intercourse between East and West.

In the earlier examples, some of the architectural features of Central Asia were adopted directly. Architects gradually absorbed and blended these features in the course of many centuries and created their own style of Chinese Islamic architecture. A local style of Islamic architecture, for example, has been developed in the Xinjiang region since Islam became the main religion of the Uighur peoples there in the 15th century.

Generally the existing examples of Islamic architecture in China can be classified into four types as follows: Central Asian type, transitional type, national minority type and Xinjiang regional type.

### **Central Asian Type**

There is a strong influence of Central Asian practices in the early examples, which can be perceived in the materials, construction and exterior treatment. The material used is either brick or stone. Arches, vaults and domes are used in construction. The mass of the building, in simple geometrical forms with distinct axes, gives the impression of stability, solemnity and monumentality.

The mausoleum of Tuhuluk Timur, a descendant of Genghis Khan, in Xinjiang has a rectangular plan with a large dome entirely of brick. The main part of the facade is nearly square, with a deeply-recessed pointed arch enclosing the entrance. The facade is covered with white, blue and purple glazed tiles in geometric patterns, which produce a glittering effect in the sunlight.

The Qing Jing Si mosque in Fujian is one of the earliest examples of Islamic architecture in China. The gate of the mosque, 20 metres

high and 4.5 metres wide, is of bluish granite. The architectural treatment, such as the ogee arches, vaulted ceilings, blank windows, inscriptions, etc., bears close stylistic resemblance to the Central Asian buildings.

### **Transitional Type**

The Phoenix mosque, on Zhongshan Road in Hangzhou, is an example of the transitional type. It was built during the Tang Dynasty, then destroyed during the Song and rebuilt during the Yuan dynasty. The prayer hall of brick is the oldest building extant. The plan is a rectangle composed of three bays across, each bay being nearly square. In each bay, brick corbels are used to support a dome above, upon which is set a Chinese-style roof that crowns the whole structure. The central bay has an octagonal roof, pyramidal in shape with two sets of eaves, while each of the side bays has a hexagonal roof, also pyramidal in shape. The roofs are covered with convex and concave tiles.

Certain features in this example, such as large wall space on the entrance facade, wide use of arches and domes, lantern-like structures over domes, all illustrate a strong Central Asian influence. However, the use of Chinese-style roofs upon domes gives a familiar, indigenous appearance and reflects the transitional period.

### **National Minority Type**

The integration of requirements of Islamic religious practices with traditional Chinese architectural planning, construction and formal details was accomplished in the mosques and mausoleums of the Hui people.

The mosque on Ox Street in Beijing is the oldest and largest among scores of mosques in the city. It was first built during the Song Dynasty (960-1127) and extended and reconstructed during that of the Mings and Qings. The mosque occupies a site which is entered from the west. The screen wall, the archway and the observation tower form and archi-

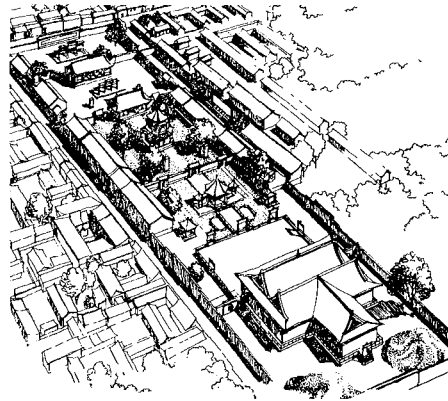
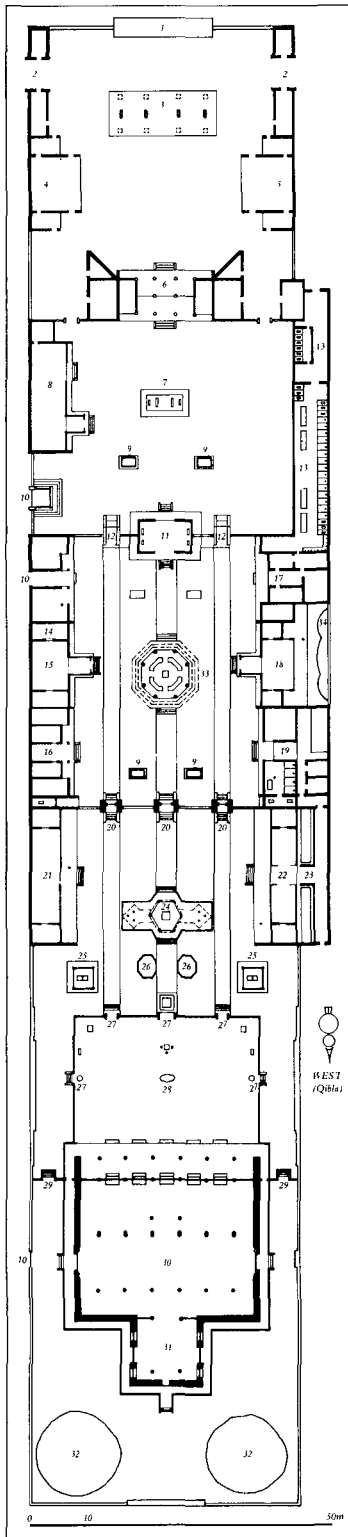
tectural group at the entrance. Further to the east of this group stands the prayer hall, which has its entrance at the rear so that the worshippers can face Mecca. Multi-foiled ogee arches of Central Asian origin are used between wooden columns of Chinese character. Decorative designs of Arabic inspiration are used on beams, columns and ceilings, but treated in relief with painting and gold accents, a Chinese tradition. In the next courtyard, there are lecture halls, stele pavilions and the minaret from which the muezzin calls the faithful to prayer. The last courtyard has the classrooms and attached baths.

The mosque in Hua Jue Xiang, Xian, was built in 1392. Occupying a narrow east-west lot, the general plan layout follows that of a typical Chinese temple, i.e. buildings symmetrically arranged along the longitudinal axis and grouped around a succession of courtyards. The main prayer hall with M-roof has a front porch and a projecting rear hall, a plan based on the Central Asian tradition. The minaret is a typical, multi-storied Chinese pavilion. The outstanding feature of the mosque is the arabesque decoration in dark red, brown and gold in the interior of the rear hall which gives a mysterious atmosphere in dim light. However, the panelled ceiling and brackets with polychrome painting in the front hall are in a traditional Chinese architectural style.

### **Xinjiang Regional Type**

A local style of architecture had been developed prior to the introduction of Islam in Xinjiang in the 10th to 11th centuries. The distinctive features are wooden columns supporting closely-spaced beams and flat roofs, adobe vaults and domes with rich surface decorations, and an open plan. The mosques in Xinjiang are based on the local architectural system, with Central Asian elements, as well as elements from Han, Hui, Tibetan and other traditions. As a result, Islamic architecture in that region has developed a peculiar style of its own.

The Aba Khoja mausoleum in Kashgar, Xinjiang, is a large architectural ensemble



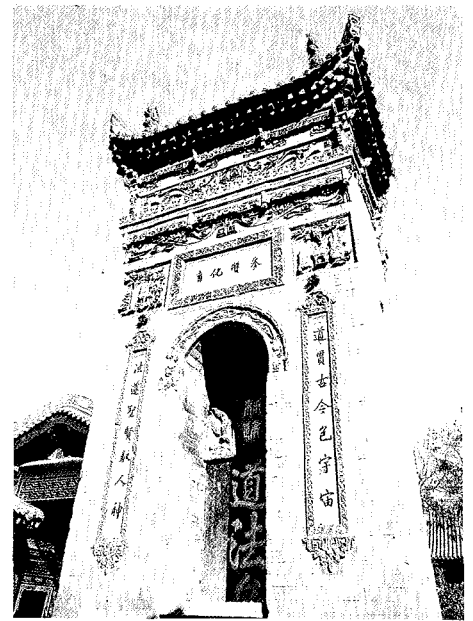
*Birds-eye view*

#### KEY

- 1 Wall of mirrors
- 2 Main entrance
- 3 Memorial archway
- 4 Visitors' room
- 5 VIP room
- 6 Two-arched gateway
- 7 Stone gateway
- 8 Reception
- 9 Stone-archways
- 10 Entrances
- 11 Three-arched gateway
- 12 Floral gates
- 13 Ablution rooms
- 14 Imam's room
- 15 Library
- 16 Restrooms
- 17 Washrooms
- 18 Visitors' lounge
- 19 Visitors' washroom
- 20 Four-bay entrance gates
- 21 North Hall
- 22 South Hall
- 23 Tablet gallery
- 24 Phoenix pavilion
- 25 Pavilion
- 26 Pond
- 27 Stone gateways
- 28 Platform
- 29 Moongate
- 30 Prayer hall
- 31 Mihrab
- 32 Moon observation hills
- 33 Sheng Xin Lou Minaret
- 34 Landscaped court

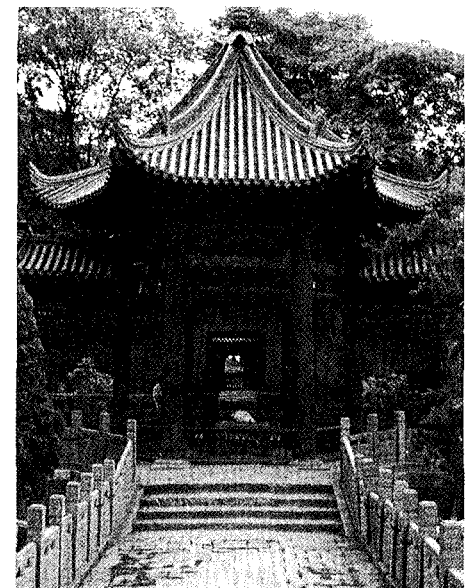
*Birds-eye view and plan of the mosque at Hua Jue Xiang, Xian*

Source J Q Cheng



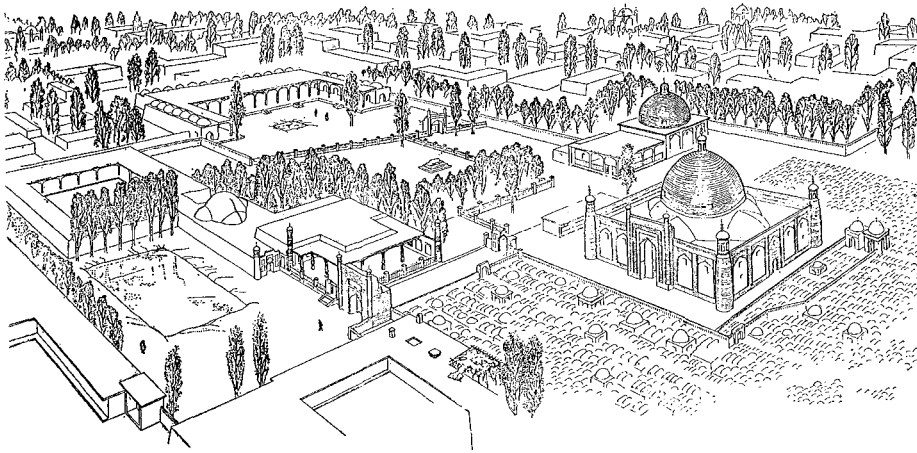
*One of four stone archways, located in the second and third courtyards, Hua Jue Xiang, Xian*

Photo C Little/Aga Khan Awards



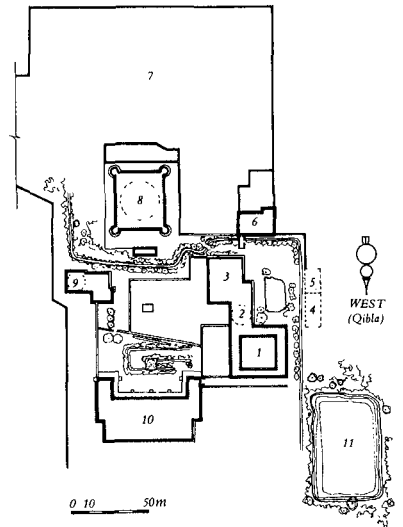
*The Phoenix Pavilion, a garden pavilion, Hua Jue Xiang, Xian*

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*Bird's eye view, Aba Khoja Mausoleum, Kashgar, Xinjiang*

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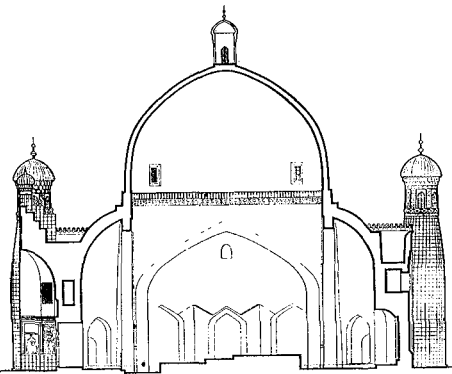


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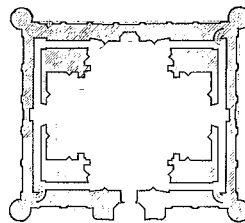
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|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1 Madrasah           | 7. Cementary         |
| 2. Lower prayer hall | (City of the dead)   |
| 3 Open prayer hall   | 8 Mausoleum          |
| 4. Bath              | 9 Green domed mosque |
| 5 Canteen            | 10 Main mosque       |
| 6 Living quarters    | 11 Pond              |

*Plot Plan, Aba Khoja Mausoleum Kashgar, Xinjiang*

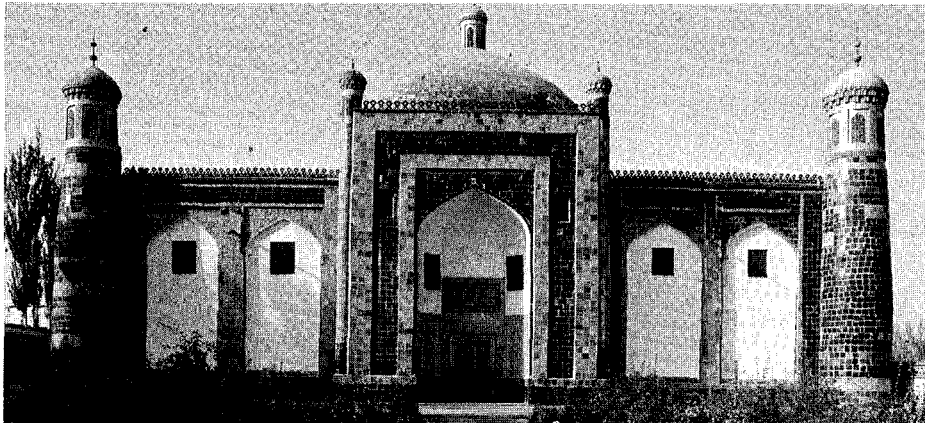
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*Section*

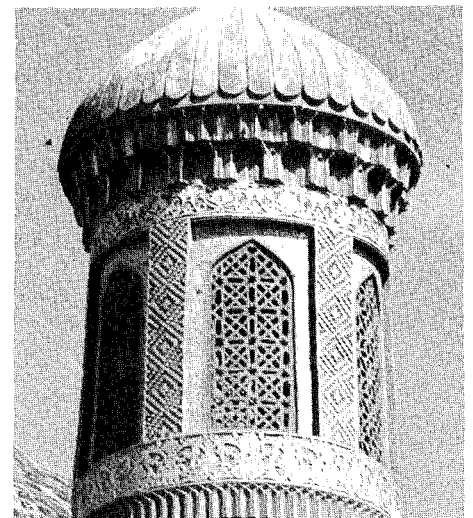


*Plan*



*Section, plan and the front view of the Mausoleum, Aba Khoja Mausoleum, Kashgar, Xinjiang*

Photo: C. Little/Aga Khan Awards.



*Detail of Minaret, Aba Khoja Mausoleum*

Photo: J.Q. Cheng

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consisting of the mausoleum, four prayer halls and one lecture hall. The construction began in the early 18th century and extensions and renovations were made later; hence the buildings are in groups. The entrance gate, the high and low prayer halls and the lecture hall form the first group in which the high prayer hall dominates. The mausoleum is the main building of the whole ensemble. It has a large dome supported on four sides by pointed arches which are, in turn, supported by thick walls. There are minarets at the four corners. The walls are covered with white and green glazed tiles. The interior is entirely white-washed, giving a solemn atmosphere. The large prayer hall with enclosing walls forms a unit by itself. Between the large prayer hall and the mausoleum there is a small green-roofed prayer hall.

The Aitika mosque in Kashgar was built in the 17th century. Two round minarets stand flanking the entrance gate of the mosque. The main hall inside the complex and facing the gate has 38 bays, a treatment seldom found in ancient architecture. The hall has an open colonnade on the front. The interior has a flat roof with joists formed into patterns and partly decorated with polychrome paintings. Along the transversal axis of the main hall, there is a projection composed of four bays by three bays, at the front, and an inner hall of eight bays with brick walls at the back. The latter is for use in winter.

The Amin mosque in Turfan, Xinjiang, was built in 1778 in memory of Amin Khoja, of Uighar descent. The mosque, which is about 44 metres high, is of adobe, whitewashed throughout. The minaret is in grey bricks with delicate patterns. Spiral steps of brick are provided in the interior of the minaret.