<<Lost China   >>

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The stunning photographic reportage of Father Leone Nani presents early twentieth-century China as seen through the lens of an "outsider" who brought to life the people, places and traditions of a lost empire. The sheer quality and quantity of his pictures, the choice of subjects and handling of widely different situations, have reserved Nani the right to be considered a master of black-and-white photography.   Leone Nani (1880-1935) lived in central China from 1904 to 1914. His missionary work took him to remote villages where he captured a world beyond the reach of other Westerners. Working in large format (mostly on glass plates he developed and printed himself in his mobile studio), Nani portrayed young couples, dignitaries, peasants and artisans. Equally gifted as an observer and reporter, he recorded everyday life scenes, religious ceremonies, architecture, and landscapes.   Beautifully reproduced here in duotone, Nani's extraordinary material bears witness to a turbulent time in China's history: a period of transition from the Q'ing dynasty into the twentieth century world order as a republic. Father Nani's pictures closed the era of Western photographers who eagerly preserved aspects of authentic China that would have otherwise been lost.

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