



**清明上河圖**  
**The Beijing Qingming Scroll**  
**and**  
**Its Significance for the Study of**  
**Chinese History**

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## Introduction

Paintings showing daily life possess enormous appeal.\* While many European painters have portrayed both the revels of the countryside and the life of the cities, fewer Chinese artists have taken everyday life as their subject. Those who have done so follow a tradition extending back to the twelfth century, in which artists used the format of a handscroll to depict an urban landscape. Many of these paintings have the word *qingming* 清明 (“clear-bright”) in their title, suggesting they depict the Qingming festival, a holiday in early spring when the living sweep their family graves. In 1954 Chinese scholars announced the discovery of a previously unknown scroll in the Beijing Palace Museum, where it had been returned from Manchuria after World War II. It was entitled *Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖. Most scholars now accept this as the earliest extant version of the scroll, reproduced in this booklet, and date it to the twelfth century.

### *The Handscroll Format*

The Beijing scroll is a handscroll measuring 25.5 centimeters (10.03 inches) in height and stretching 5.25 meters (5.74 yards) in length, done in monochrome ink on silk. The original has faded to a warm brown with a few details—like the green buds of willows—in color. Although the scroll is over eight hundred years old, it is in surprisingly good condition, with only a few patches and many fine vertical cracks along the grain of the silk.

Even though modern museums often display handscrolls stretched out full-length under a glass case, they were originally intended to be held by the viewer, who would unroll only an arm’s length section at a time. Starting at the right end of the scroll, and progressing to the left, the viewer determined the pace. The Beijing scroll includes many moments of suspense to entice the viewer to keep on looking. Because, with the use of perspective, the artist can make something seem to come closer and then to recede, a handscroll can show the same object from different angles. The Beijing scroll often employs an overhead perspective, as if one is watching the people and activities from above—standing on a city wall perhaps—but occasionally the artist dramatically shifts his angle of vision. In the center of the scroll, the artist first paints the underside of the central bridge and then draws back to depict the many people and shops on top of the bridge (sections 13-14).

The original Beijing handscroll has been reproduced in a limited edition, now difficult to find except in the best libraries. (A reproduction of the imperially commissioned copy of the scroll, done in 1736, can still be obtained from the Palace Museum in Taiwan.) Many reproductions blur the scroll’s captivating details. Using large plate-glass negatives, the Beijing Palace Museum photographed the entire scroll in 26 black-and-white sections. Because this reproduction divides the scroll into discreet sections, it sacrifices the original handscroll format to achieve clarity (if the reader wishes to re-

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\* Allow me to thank the many people who have helped me in the course of my research on the scroll: the anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies*, and its infinitely patient editor James M. Hargett, and—in alphabetical order—Joseph R. Allen III, Richard Barnhart, Lin Xiaoping, Kate A. Lingley, Liu Heping, Miyazaki Noriko, Larissa Schwartz, Paul J. Smith, Peter Sturman, Sarah Wang, Wang Shufeng, Wu Hung, Wu Pei-yi, and the Yale students who took or served as teaching assistants in History 315. I would also like to thank Roderick Whitfield, whose doctoral dissertation and subsequent publications have guided my study of the painting, and Zhu Qingsheng of Beijing University, who helped me to decipher the signs on the scroll.

create the handscroll, one should match the right edge of section 2 along the left edge of section 1, and so on). The resulting photographs capture each line as the artist painted it, so that one can even make out the faint Chinese characters on some of the small street stall signs.

### *Urban Life in Twelfth-Century China*

The scroll begins in the early morning, in a rural area just outside a city. Even in the first scene, we see evidence of commerce, as the woodsmen lead donkeys carrying fuel to market. The scroll's first shops are just opening for business in section 7, which depicts the large- and small-scale enterprises so characteristic of the twelfth-century commercial revolution. An individual peddler adjusts his shirt before picking up his display rack loaded with small round items, possibly toys. We also see a long-distance grain boat, staffed by many laborers and directed by a seated merchant. Several centuries earlier, improved agricultural techniques, combined with new rice strains from Southeast Asia, had produced sufficient agricultural surplus so that some farmers could devote themselves part-time to growing cash crops or making handicrafts. Others continued to grow their own food. As the market economy developed, the people who pursued full-time occupations came to buy all of their foodstuffs at the market.

By the time of the scroll, a complex network covered the entire empire, with some goods, like grain, salt, and luxury items, being traded across regions. As the market system expanded, merchants found coins, silver, and gold too cumbersome. Instead they used personal notes for financial transactions. Eventually these notes circulated so widely that they developed into the world's first paper money, which the government took over at the beginning of the eleventh century. By 1100, China's cities numbered among the world's largest, and the population of its capital exceeded some five hundred thousand.

As the viewer unrolls the scroll, one sees the many pleasures cities offered: taverns, restaurants, stores, and, above all, lively crowds. The bridge scene, the undeniable high point of the scroll, appears just at its halfway point (sections 13-14). It shows a bridge teeming with people coming and going, some pausing to buy a snack from its stalls, others peering below at the water traffic. A few of the stands on the bridge, like that for cakes on a table, are temporary, while those with roofs could not be dismantled as easily. Crowds gather on the bridge and on the near bank where they urge on the boatmen struggling to regain control of the ship whose tow-line has snapped. Other bystanders watch the action on the bridge itself, where a figure in a sedan-chair has a stand-off with a mounted rider who refuses to give way.

Just past the bridge, a two-storey tavern bears an imposing trellis, but its sign identifies it as a branch winestore, not a first-class establishment, the first of which appears only inside the city wall (section 22). Because the level of commercial activity remains equally high on both sides of the dilapidated city wall, one can barely detect the difference between the areas inside and outside the wall.

In this respect, twelfth-century Chinese cities differed markedly from earlier cities, which had been subject to strict government controls. Officials had carefully monitored markets, which opened only at noon, closed at sunset, and occupied designated sections of the city, always within the city wall. By the twelfth century, markets had burgeoned outside city walls, where they stayed open all day and night without government interference. The scroll ends somewhat abruptly in a city street, where a distinguished gentleman in an elongated sombrero begins to take the journey the viewer has just completed.

## The Scroll's Artist

Surprisingly little is known about the artist who painted this scroll of such magnificence and power. The sole information we have appears in the colophons at the end of the scroll. Like collectors in the West who wrote their names on the fly-leaves on books, Chinese owners often appended written notes, called colophons, to their paintings, which they also stamped with their personal seals. This long scroll contains just under one hundred seals and colophons, all of which have been translated in Roderick Whitfield's dissertation. Some of the seals on the scroll label it as belonging to the emperor's personal collection, while the colophons express their authors' appreciation of the painting and occasionally provide useful background.

The most informative colophon, and the earliest in date, says:

Hanlin Zhang Zeduan 張擇端, styled Zhengdao 正道, is a native of Dongwu 東武 [now Zhucheng 諸城, Shandong]. When young, he studied and traveled to the capital for further study. Later he practiced painting things. He showed talent for ruled-line painting, and especially liked boats and carts, markets and bridges, moats and paths. He was an expert in other types of painting as well.

According to "A Record of Mr. Xiang's Views on Paintings," *Regatta on the Western Lake* (*Xihu zhengbiao tu* 西湖爭標圖) and *Peace Reigns Over the River* (*Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖) are placed in the category of inspired paintings. The owner should treasure it.

On the day after the Qingming festival, in 1186, Zhang Zhu 張著 from Yanshan 燕山 wrote this colophon.<sup>1</sup>

Because this passage omits as much information as it provides, scholars have devoted considerable energy to understanding its contents.

Zhang Zhu, the colophon's author, was an official who curated paintings for the non-Chinese Jin dynasty, which conquered north China in 1126. The colophon's first sentence gives the artist's name, Zhang Zeduan, and another name he went by, Zhengdao. Puzzlingly, the passage places the term *hanlin* 翰林 before his name. Hanlin had two meanings at the time. It could refer to the Hanlin Institute of Academicians (Hanlin xueshi yuan 翰林學士院), a prestigious branch of the central government, which drafted documents for the emperor and whose members included those scholars with the greatest literary talents. Yet Hanlin could as well refer to members of the Imperial Painting Academy (Hanlin tuhua yuan 翰林圖畫院). The second-to-last emperor of the Northern Song, Huizong (reigned 1100-1126), attained fame for his own bird-and-flower paintings. His academy provided support for many contemporary artists, who were called Hanlin painters. But the biography's phrasing is puzzling, because in either case—whether bureaucrat or artist—the correct title was several characters longer than the ambiguous two characters given by this text.

Continuing the enigmas, the biography does not provide the artist's dates so we do not know when he was born or when he visited the capital. The colophon does tell us the name of his artistic technique, ruled-line painting, which resembles modern technical drawing. Artists in this school used tools like a straight edge to do drawings of buildings, boats, and other structures. Two of Zhang Zeduan's paintings, the biography continues, received the highest possible rating in a contemporary painting catalogue by a certain Mr. Xiang. His book no longer exists.

1. Roderick Whitfield (1965: 154, 158-59) reproduces the text in Chinese and gives a full translation, which I have altered slightly.

## The Title of the Scroll

This title's meaning poses the final conundrum. Everyone agrees *shanghe tu* ("going-along-the-river picture") refers to the river shown in the painting. But what does *qingming* (literally "clear-bright") mean? Commenting that he wrote the entry the day after the Qingming festival, Zhang Zhu clearly thought it denoted the grave-sweeping festival, which came one hundred days after the winter solstice, sometime in April. The scroll does show a small procession of people with willow brooms wedged into a sedan-chair (section 5), who may be returning from sweeping graves in the countryside. And women do stand clustered around a basket of willow brooms in front of a three-storied inn (section 23), which probably offers female companionship in addition to wine and food.<sup>2</sup>

But those who doubt that the scroll shows the festival (myself included) wonder why the artist has not shown more of the activities associated with the grave-sweeping festival. Contemporary accounts describe how each household hung bunches of willow leaves on every roof, how women put willow twigs in their hair, and how people ate date dumplings—none of which appear in the scroll. One observer, a man named Meng Yuanlao 孟元老, wrote a memoir describing life in the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng before its fall in 1126. He mentions stores selling paper goods and incense to be used in worshipping deities. During the Qingming festival, these stores "displayed multi-layered paper houses on the street," Meng reports. Such houses could be purchased year-round by bereaved families, who burned them at funerals in the hope that the recently dead would receive comparable housing in the underworld. The scroll portrays a store displaying one such house (section 8, top center),<sup>3</sup> but the sleepy store with its owner attracts no customers and could hardly be the focus of a busy festival.

The same observer, Meng Yuanlao, also describes the crush of people—men and women—in the street on the festival day:

The well-off and the commoners filled all the gates.... The outskirts in all directions are as crowded as markets. Under fragrant trees and between fields and gardens people put down cups and plates. They feed and urge each other to drink. The singing and dancing girls of the capital city fill every garden and every pavilion, and return home only at dusk.<sup>4</sup>

People gather outside, especially in the mid-afternoon scene near the end of the scroll (sections 24 and 25), but they do not pack the streets. Even more surprising is the relative absence of women. Of the five hundred people shown in the scroll, only twenty or so are women, many of them seated inside sedan chairs or boats. The reason why the artist should have painted so few women is not clear. Women, especially those of high birth, may have stayed inside much of the time, but Meng Yuanlao

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2. Let me correct an earlier error. The figure in section 24 whom I mistakenly identified as a "fatter woman" (Hansen 1996: 199) is actually a man with a child on his shoulders.

3. These photographs allowed me to see the shop clearly for the first time. In the earlier version of this essay (Hansen 1996: 197), I mistakenly wrote the store contained no such paper structures.

4. Meng Yuanlao, *Dongjing menghua lu* 東京夢華錄 (Beijing: Zhongguo shangye chubanshe, 1982), 7.43. Wu Pei-yi reminded me of this passage and graciously provided a partial translation, which I have included here. He also suggested the phrasing for the translation of the title (personal communication, June 11, 1995).

emphatically states they too participated in the Qingming festival—in which case we should expect to see them on the streets of the scroll.

Qingming has another possible meaning, “peaceful and orderly,” with the resulting translation as *Peace Reigns Over the River*. This interpretation fits nicely with the idealization so prevalent throughout the scroll. The scroll shows all the splendors of a city—tall buildings, broad streets, complex bridges, fancy restaurants—with none of the accompanying urban blight—no dirt, no beggars, no hunger, and no illness. People in all walks of life, from scholars in long gowns to laborers in short leggings, perform their tasks happily and harmoniously. The city’s garrison stands empty, its wall unguarded (sections 19, 22).

### *The City in the Scroll*

For most modern viewers, cities conjure up images of crime, dirt, and slums. But to Zhang Zeduan cities represented all the benefits of China’s burgeoning market economy. Although everything looks cleaner and newer than in real life, each component, whether a wheelbarrow, house, boat, or food-stall, is shown in lavish, realistic detail. The painter has painted both the exteriors and interiors of taverns and houses. The streets and waterways in the scroll curve and bend in convincing ways, just as the crowds bunch and thin in true-to-life patterns. The extraordinary details of the scroll celebrate twelfth-century urban life.

What city could this be? Although art historical tradition holds that the artist painted the Northern Song capital of Kaifeng, and much energy has been devoted to linking different features in the scroll with places in Kaifeng, no distinctive landmarks stand out. Nothing in the scroll can be identified as unique to Kaifeng. The rainbow bridge is unusual, but other cities had such bridges. So too with the multi-storied structures. The artist has painstakingly depicted every building, street, and waterway in a generic way so that each is realistic yet resolutely anonymous. Two of the restaurants bear signs, which read “Branch Wineshop” (section 15) and “Wholesaler” (section 24), or a first-class establishment. These are categories of wine-shops, not names of real restaurants in Kaifeng, which we know from Meng Yuanlao’s memoir and other sources. Both served customers, and the wholesalers supplied the branch wineshops with wine. If Zhang Zeduan had wanted to portray Kaifeng, he could simply have included a prominent landmark. Many candidates exist—a famous temple, a pagoda, or most obviously, the Song imperial palace (later artists often opted to paint the palace of Beijing in their Qingming scrolls). Zhang’s failure to portray any of the capital’s sights must be taken as evidence that he did not want to paint Kaifeng.

Instead he chose to create an ideal city. We can only speculate about his unrecorded motives. It would have been natural for him to make his scroll as a reminder of the past glories of the Song, before the humiliating defeat of 1126. If Zhang created his scroll under non-Chinese rule, and the first records of the scroll place it in the Jindynasty imperial collection, he would have had good reason to depict a generic city defying easy identification. His scroll evokes a bygone time in which cities prospered and their residents flourished. Like more recent Chinese critics of the government, he left it to the viewer to deduce his target.

The Qingming scroll is a masterful artistic creation, whose many layers of meaning defy a pat reading. With each viewing, the observer gains new understanding of the people and the city shown in such vivid detail. The spellbinding artistry of the scroll, coupled with the lack of documentation about its maker and his subject, guarantee that future generations will find the study of the scroll just as tantalizing—and just as rewarding—as their predecessors.

## Further Readings

Cahill, James

1988 "Political Themes in Chinese Painting." In *Three Alternative Histories of Chinese Painting*. Lawrence, Kansas: Spencer Museum of Art, 1988. A prominent art historian shows how subtly Chinese artists (including Zhang Zeduan) treated the theme of protest.

Ebrey, Patricia Buckley

1986 "Early Stages of Descent Group Organization." In Patricia Buckley Ebrey and James L. Watson, eds. *Kinship Organization in Late Imperial China, 1000-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 20-29. A social historian surveys the development of the Qingming festival in the Tang and Song dynasties.

1993 *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Women in the Sung Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press. This prize-winning book provides a masterful discussion of women's lives at the time of the scroll by drawing on materials from a large variety of sources.

Gernet, Jacques

1970 *Daily Life on the Eve of the Mongol Invasion*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. This book presents much information about Chinese cities during the thirteenth century, some of it taken from Marco Polo's often unreliable account.

Hansen, Valerie

1996 "The Mystery of the Qingming Scroll and Its Subject: The Case Against Kaifeng." *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 26 (1996): 183-200.

Ho, Wai-kam

1988 "Aspects of Chinese Painting from 1100 to 1350." In *Eight Dynasties of Chinese Painting: The Collection of the Nelson Gallery-Atkins Museum, Kansas City, and the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Cleveland: Cleveland Museum of Art), pp. xxv-xxx. This essay gives a very helpful history of the imperial painting academy during the Song dynasty.

Hsiao Ch'iuung-jui

1992 "A New Look at the Title of Ch'ing-ming Shang-he T'u." In *Proceedings of International Colloquium on Chinese Art History, 1991: Painting and Calligraphy* (Taipei: The National Palace Museum, 1992), pp. 111-16. The English abstract summarizes recent articles in Chinese that re-interpret the scroll.

Jiang Qingxiang and Xiao Guoliang

1981 "Glimpses of the Urban Economy in Bianjing, Capital of the Northern Song Dynasty," (*Social Sciences in China* 4:145-76). This article translates many long passages from Meng Yuanlao's memoir about life in Kaifeng.

Johnson, Linda Cooke

1996 "The Place of Qingming Shanghe tu in the Historical Geography of Song Dynasty Dongjing," *Journal of Sung-Yuan Studies* 26 (1996): 145-82. While arguing that the scroll depicts Kaifeng, the author cites a wealth of data about the geography of the Song capital.



Maeda, Robert

1975 "Chieh-hua: Ruled-Line Painting in China." *Ars Orientalis* 10: 123-41. This article traces the history of this tradition and reproduces many paintings in it.

Needham, Joseph, et al

1954-continuing *Science and Civilisation in China*. New York: Cambridge University Press. These many volumes present a detailed history of Chinese inventions shown in the scroll, including ships and bridges.

Whitfield, Roderick

1965 "Chang Tse-tuan's Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u." Ph.D. diss., Princeton University. My captions draw heavily on this seminal study, which provides a close stylistic analysis of the scroll. In addition to providing translations of all the colophons, Whitfield lists extant versions of the scroll. Unfortunately, the illustrations in the photocopied reproduction available from University Microfilms are almost completely impossible to make out.

1970 "Chang Tse-tuan's Ch'ing-ming shang-ho t'u." In *Proceedings of the International Symposium on Chinese Painting*, June 18-24, 1970 (Taipei: National Palace Museum), pp. 351-90. A transcribed and lively discussion of the scroll by different scholars follows this essay.

1986 "Aspects of Time and Place in Zhang Zeduan's Qingming shanghe tu." In *Toyō bijutsu ni okeru Fūzoku hyōgen* [English title] *The Representation of Genre in East Asian Art* (Toyonaka-shi: Kokusai kōryū bijitsushi kenkyūkai), pp. 40-46. Here Whitfield offers a reading of the scroll that traces its frequent shifts of perspective.

Wu, Pei-yi

1994 "Memories of K'ai-feng." *New Literary History* 25: 47-60. A literary scholar provides a close reading of Meng Yuanlao's memoir, which he likens to a photograph.



Section 1: The scroll opens in the early morning with a small procession of donkeys carrying fuel in baskets. Led by one woodsman, and followed by another, the donkeys are just about to turn left so they can cross the bridge and so lead the viewer into the scroll. The trees along the path have not yet begun to bud, suggesting it may be winter or early spring.

The four seals appearing on the right edge were placed on the scroll in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and identify it as belonging to the imperial collection of the Qing dynasty.



Section 2. The stream pulls the viewer by a house with a tiled roof and an open shed, whose simple wooden benches remain unoccupied in the early morning stillness.



Section 3. The stream continues by another farm with thatched roofs. A millstone lies unused in the threshing ground. A figure, barely visible between two trees, enters the house on the right.





Section 4. The scroll shifts to a close-up of these magnificent willow trees, the high point of the first third of the painting. Their scarred trunks reveal that all their branches have been cut off so that only their new limbs produce the luxuriant growth of early spring. This type of pruning, called pollarding, made tree roots grow longer, and so strengthened the river banks on which the trees were planted.



Section 5. The stream meanders further through pollarded willows and passes by a figure seated by a basket. The door of a shed lies open to reveal a saw. On the bank below it a woman with a head-dress rides a donkey led by a man.

From the top edge of the scroll comes a procession of figures, one on horseback, others on foot. Two laborers in short leggings carry a sedan-chair, surrounded by willow brooms used for sweeping. The men in front are gesturing after a running figure, arousing the viewer's curiosity.

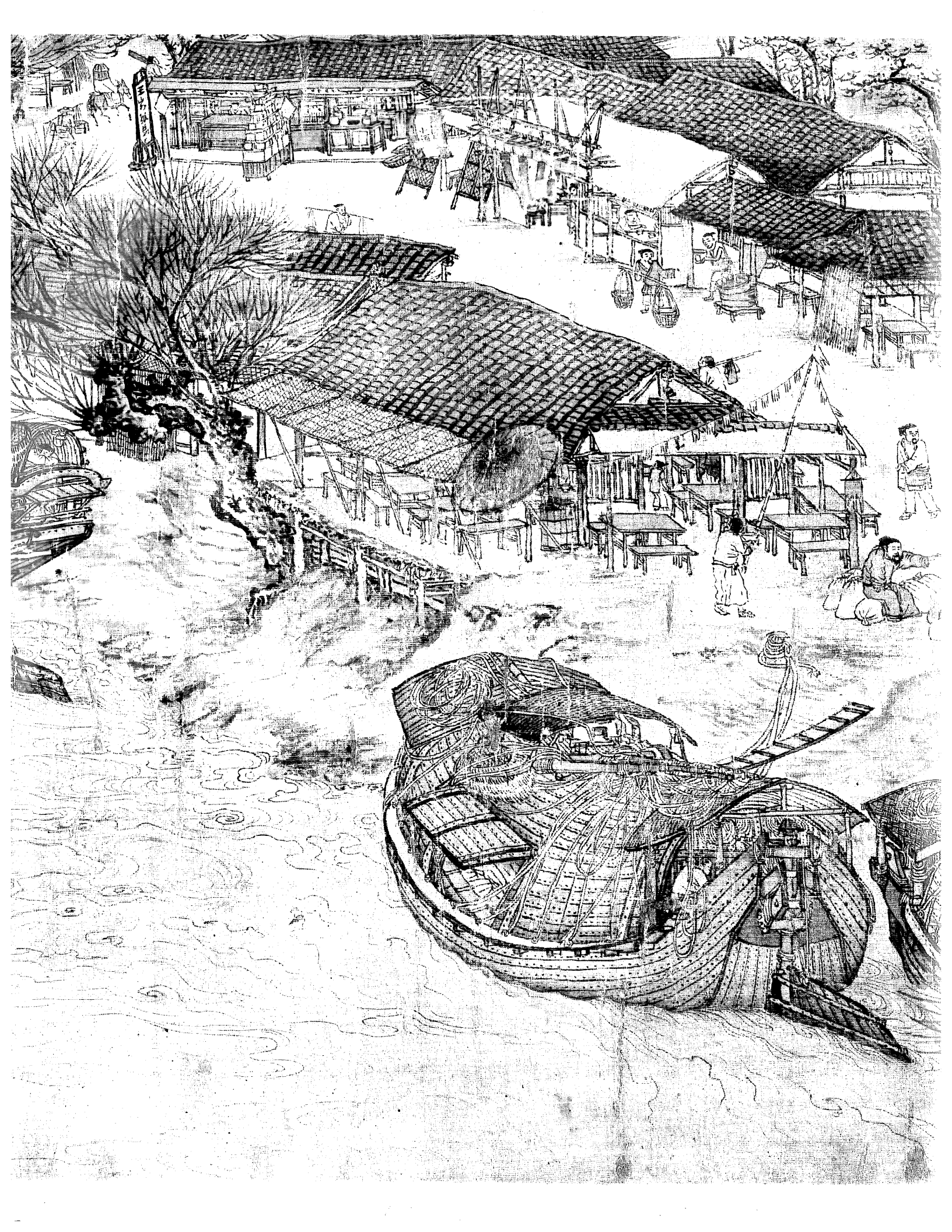


Section 6. Unrolling the scroll, the viewer discovers the reason for the excitement. A horse, with its body obscured by a tear in the scroll, gallops away. Just below the tear a woman plays with a small child. To the left, a cow and a seated figure inside a nearby farmhouse calmly look on. Behind them are evenly spaced fields, divided by irrigation channels. At the top left, under the trees, is a well, where a figure balancing pails on a pole heads home.

In the foreground, two women on donkeys cross the stream, aided by three men on foot. The women's headdresses indicate they are not well-off, as does the fact that they ride donkeys, and not in sedan-chairs. Yet because they are not on foot, the viewer realizes they are not poor either.



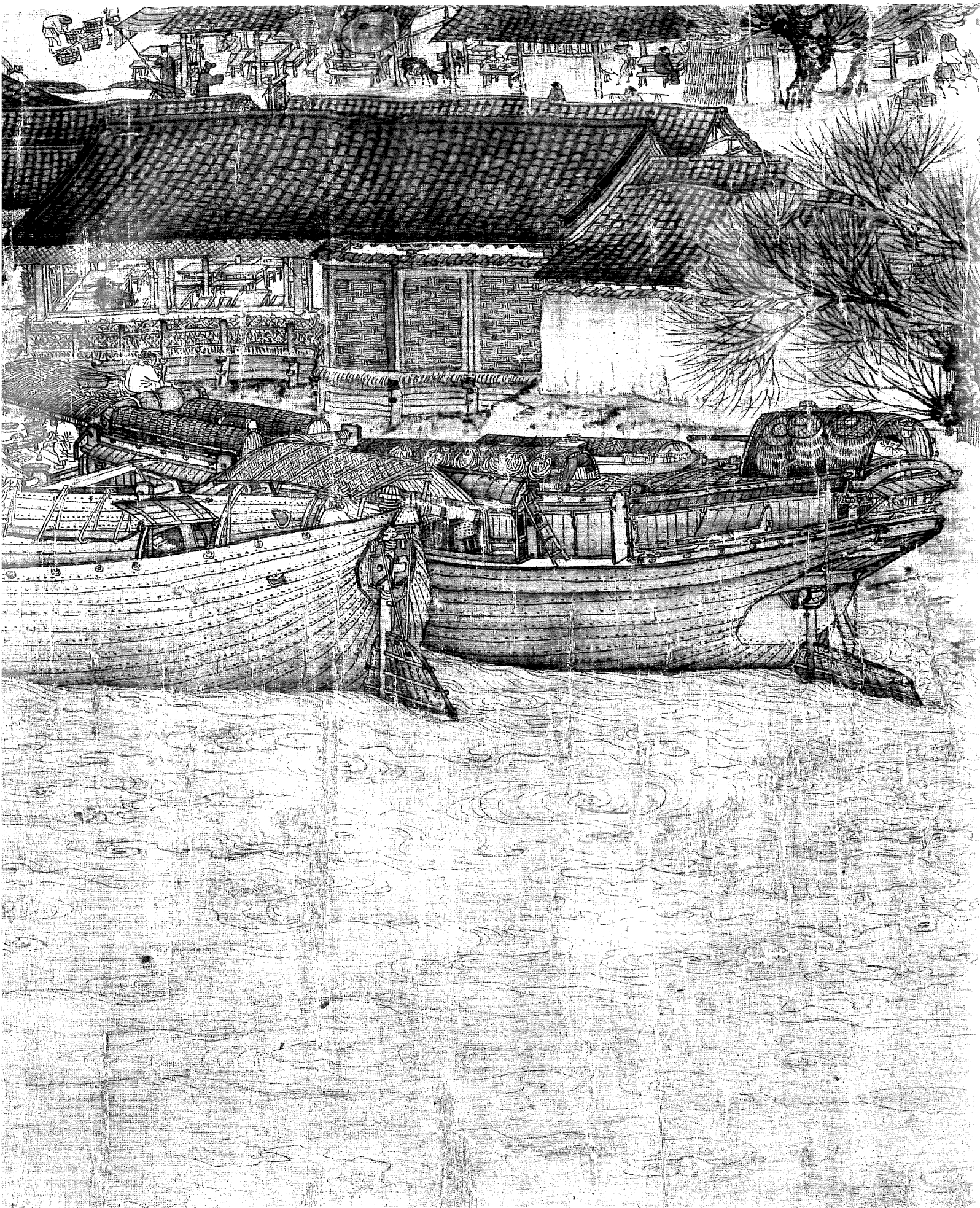
Section 7. The path brings us to the outskirts of the city, where the morning is well under way. A restaurant keeper erects a pole with tattered pennants showing he is open for business. In front of his shop an elderly figure, possibly a fortune-teller, carries a staff with an illegible flag. In the shop behind him several figures are breakfasting, while a peddler puts on his shirt. His display rack lies at his feet. At the bottom edge, boats are moored in a river. On shore, a seated merchant orders laborers to unload grain from the boat.





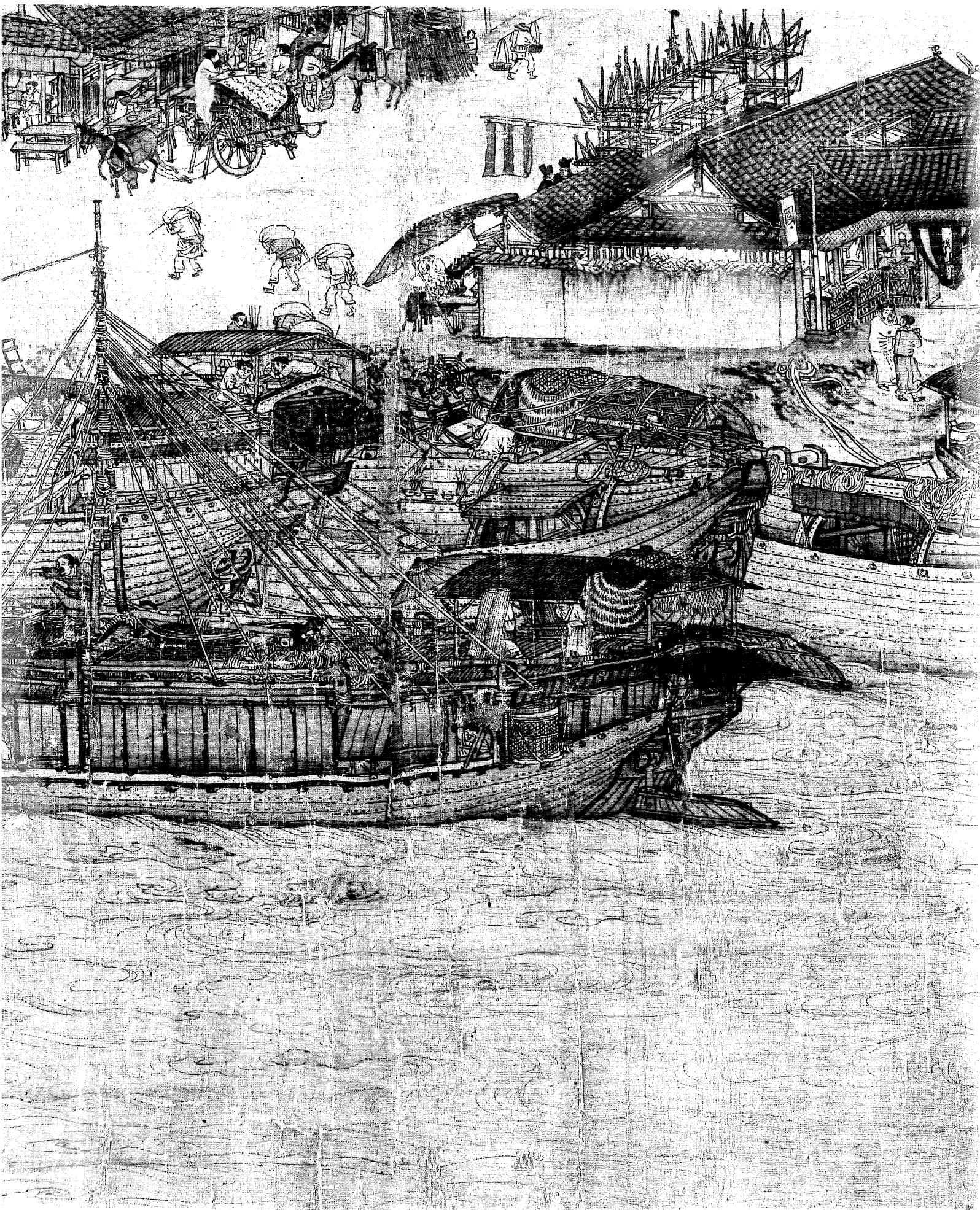
Section 8. The river widens dramatically to show two carefully rendered boats moored on it. In the boat to the left, whose stern is visible, a man dozes under a roof from which hang several circular rain-hats and rain coats made from bundles of straw.

At the top of the section, another woman rides a donkey. Immediately to her right is a store selling paper goods to be burned at funerals. Inside the shop is a man, presumably the Mr. Wang whose name appears on the shop's sign, "The Wang Family Paper Goods" (王家紙馬). Extending into the street is a paper model of a multi-storey house.

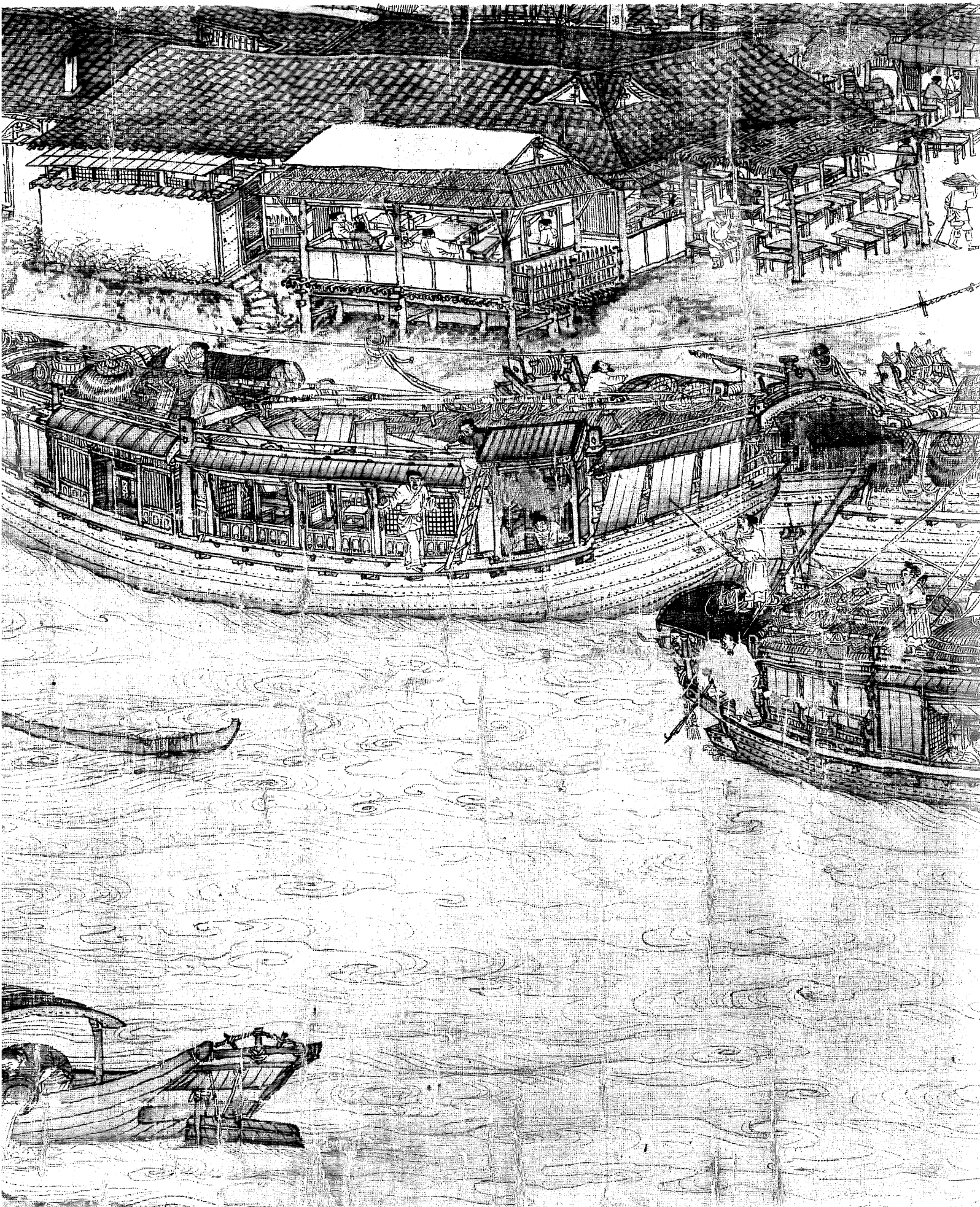


Section 9. The scroll divides into water below and land above. Crouching under the matted roof on the bow of the boat whose full length is shown, a man stands by the stove in the kitchen. Above him, a boatman rests on the boat's woven roof. On shore, two figures are about to enter a tavern, whose door is covered by a hanging piece of cloth.

The viewer can see the stern-post rudders of both boats. Because this steering device, which was mounted on the outside rear of the hull, could be lowered or raised according to the depth of the water, this type of rudder made it possible to steer through crowded harbors, narrow channels, and river rapids.



Section 10. The road-side entrance to the inn is decorated with an ornate bamboo trellis decked with a three-strip hanging flag, a characteristic feature of wine shops at the time. Across the street is a restaurant, where two donkeys rest as their owner adjusts the load on the center-wheeled wheelbarrow they are pulling. On the water are more barges. One man stands at the mast of the boat in the foreground gesticulating to the crew. Below him an open window shows a woman with a small child on the left. A tow-line extends left from the mast, inviting the viewer to continue unrolling the scroll. The painter's command of detail is so great that he shows the shrouds towards the back of the boat pulled tight while those to the front sag slightly.



Section 11. The tow-rope from the boat's mast runs through this entire section, pulling the viewer along with it and raising the question of how the boats will get around the moored boats appearing below the line. Above the line, on shore, several figures in gowns and kerchiefs, probably literati, lounge about inside a restaurant. Low-level officials, clerks, students, and examination candidates all wore such kerchiefs tied over a stiff black form.

Just under the tow-line stand two large winches through which the boats' mooring lines run, keeping the two boats close to shore. On the boat in the foreground, a man holding a hooked boat pole stands on a wooden walkway along the edge of the vessel. One can see tables and chairs through the windows of the boat close to shore, which is probably a pleasure boat for visiting tourists. On it, a woman gazes at the river from a large ornamental window.

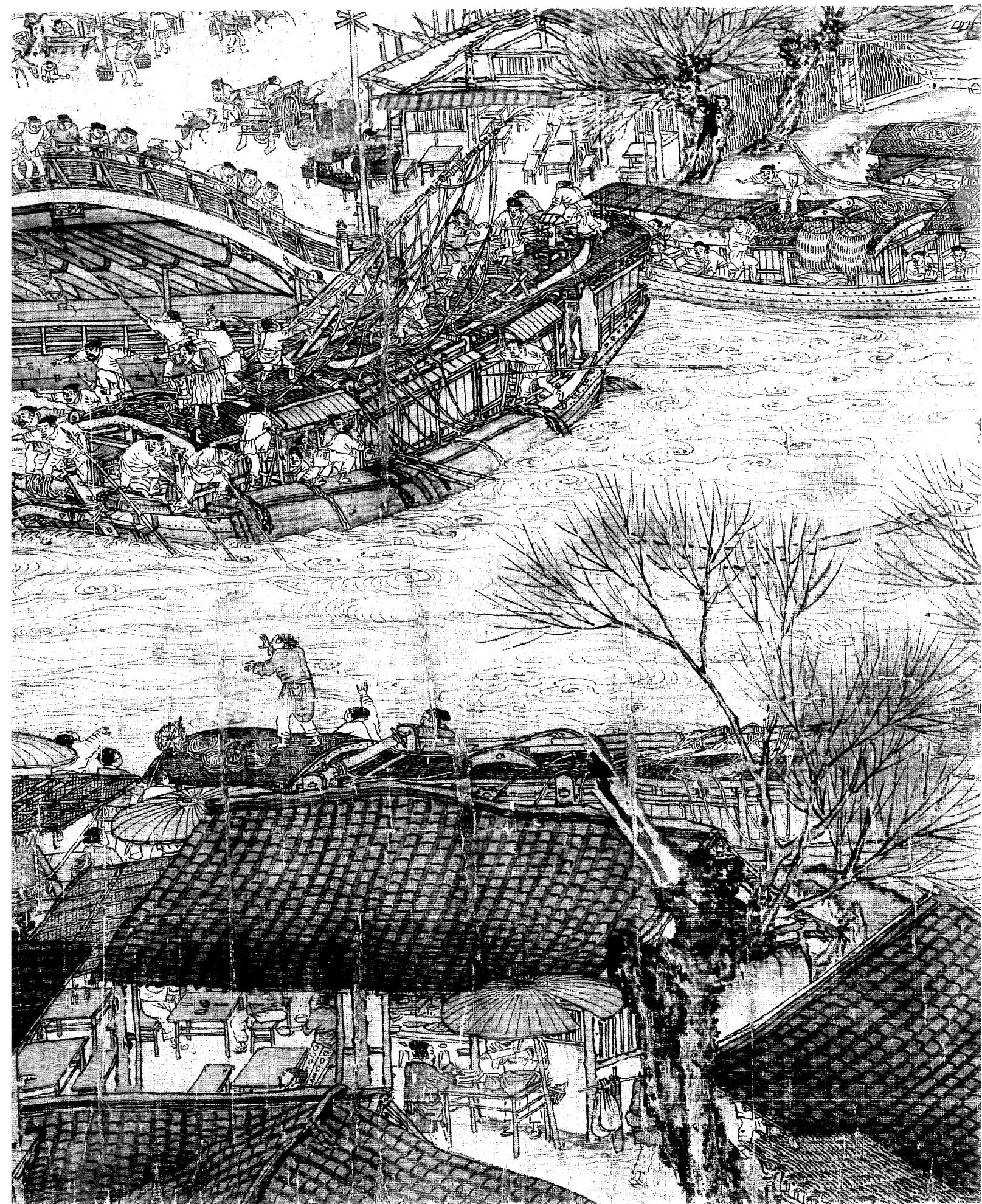
A large expanse of water, complete with eddies, covers much of the scroll, whose foreground shows a woman doing laundry and pouring water into the river. The drying clothes hang on the roof of the sampan where she lives.



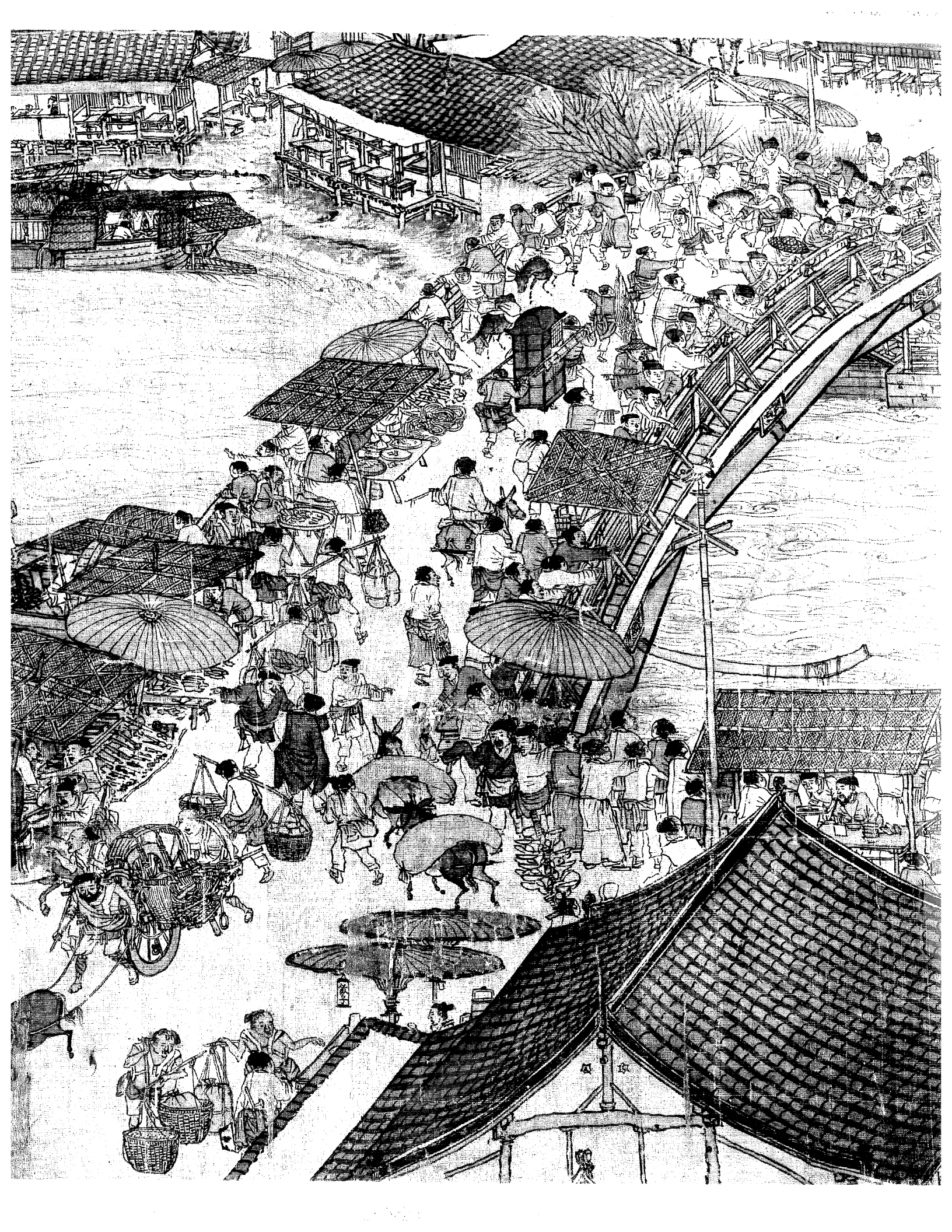


Section 12. The tow-rope from section 10 reaches its end on the path above the river, where five trackers are pulling it upstream, against the current. The middle figure wears the type of round hat and straw rain coat that hang on so many of the boats. Below them, eight men heave with effort as they use a sculling oar to guide their boat, obscured by trees, downstream (to the viewer's right).

On the near bank a woman, who is wearing a veiled traveling hat, rides into the city.

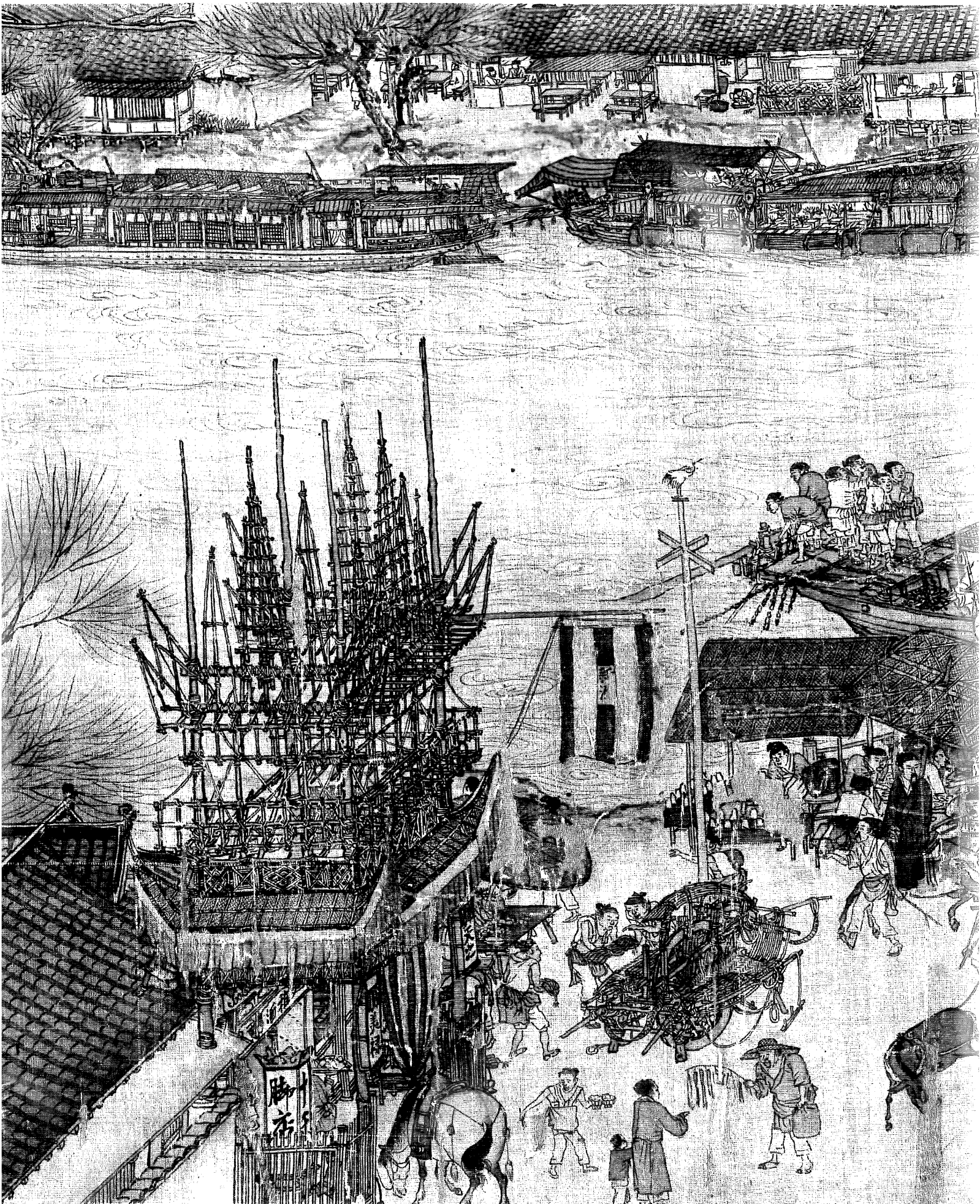


Section 13. A view of the rainbow bridge, the dramatic high point of the scroll, shows its cantilevered wooden beams, held together by iron bands. Under it is a walkway at water level where a few trackers stand as they frantically try to right the course of a boat whose tow-line has snapped. The strong current has pushed the boat so that it stands almost at a right angle to the bank, rather than parallel to it. On the wayward boat, a boatman tries to grab the bridge above him with his hook. Two of the onlookers have climbed over the rail to see if they can help, and one man has tossed the boat a rope, which uncoils in mid-air. Other boatmen quickly lower the mast, so the boat can make it under the bridge, while others struggle with poles to hold the boat steady. In hopes of averting a collision, the men at the bow excitedly signal to a boat not yet visible on the opposite shore.



Section 14. The scroll shifts perspective so that the viewer sees the bridge from above and realizes the boat to the left is safely moored, where it poses no danger to the out-of-control boat.

Food stands run along the two sides of the bridge, leaving little room for traffic. On the top of the bridge, another potential collision is about to occur where a man on horseback refuses to give way to a sedan-chair accompanied by several adamant servants. On the lower left, a vendor has arrayed various tools, including pincer-shaped scissors, on a cloth spread out on the ground. A scholar on horseback rides by the tool display, and a man pushing a center-wheeled wheelbarrow is aided by a donkey and a man in front. To the right, at the bottom of the section, three lightly clad workmen put their loads down as they buy refreshments from a stand whose sign reading “Drinks” (飲子) hangs from an umbrella. The two tall poles at the two ends of the bridge warn approaching ships of the bridge’s location; at night lanterns hung from the poles to serve as beacons.



Section 15. The viewer's eye travels down the bridge to the bottom of the scroll, where one sees a riderless horse tied next to a sign reading "Branch Wineshop" (脚店). The horse's master has gone into the inn, which also has a towering lattice structure built above its gate. From the gate, a pole extends horizontally bearing the three-strip flag marking a tavern. The middle strip reads "New wine" (新酒). Next to the horse a man brings two bowls and chopsticks to someone who has ordered take-out food. To the right, a woman and small child examine banners from a peddler, while above them a vendor sells rope from his bamboo cart.

At the top of the section, three long, flat houseboats, possibly used for touring, are anchored on the shore of the waterway. The owners of the boat to the right have even designed a shipboard garden of potted plants.





Section 16. Fine lines mark the varying eddies of the river as it changes course, and the far bank recedes from view. In the foreground, the overhead perspective permits a close look at the customers who sit around a table in second-floor room of the branch wine-shop. Outside the window, the woman accompanying them rests her arm on the railing as she gazes down at the street.

At the top of the section, two boats pass each other, this time without incident. Trackers pull the one going upstream, while that going downstream bears men who work long sculling oars at both ends of the boat.



Section 17. In the foreground, several men sit on chairs at tables in a street-side restaurant. Above them, the river flows upward and out of view. On the street, which follows the river's course, a wheelwright and his apprentice work in their small shop. The wheelwright gently taps the wooden sections of the wheel onto the spokes with a mallet, while his apprentice readies new wooden sections. They are making a wheelbarrow, whose frame lies at their feet.



Section 18. The street scene continues. At the upper right, a seated man tells a story while referring to the scroll rolled open in front of him. Below him a workman carries food stacked in steamers on his left shoulder along with a folding table in his right hand. It must be lunchtime because a woman servant with her hair in a bun brings a bowl from the restaurant in the center of the scene to her mistress seated in the sedan chair. The two plump men who mount their horse and donkey look sated. To left of the restaurant a client consults a fortune-teller, whose stall advertises three different services: “determining auspicious days” (變 轂), “fortune-telling” (看 命), and “prognostication” (神 課).

In the foreground of the painting, two cows (complete with udders) pull a cart whose wheels look exactly like those made by the wheelwright. A woman with a braid dangling beneath her traveling hat follows on horseback. Because married women put their hair up, she is probably unmarried. To the left, a workman, whose feet are cut off by the scroll's bottom edge, carries stacked trays on a pole. Just inside the restaurant, a small child looks on.



Section 19. The street continues in front of a military barracks with spiked bamboo or wood set in its earthen walls. Having eaten their lunch, its guards doze lazily by its gate. In the foreground hangs another three-strip flag of a tavern. To the far left, a woman gets into a sedan chair.





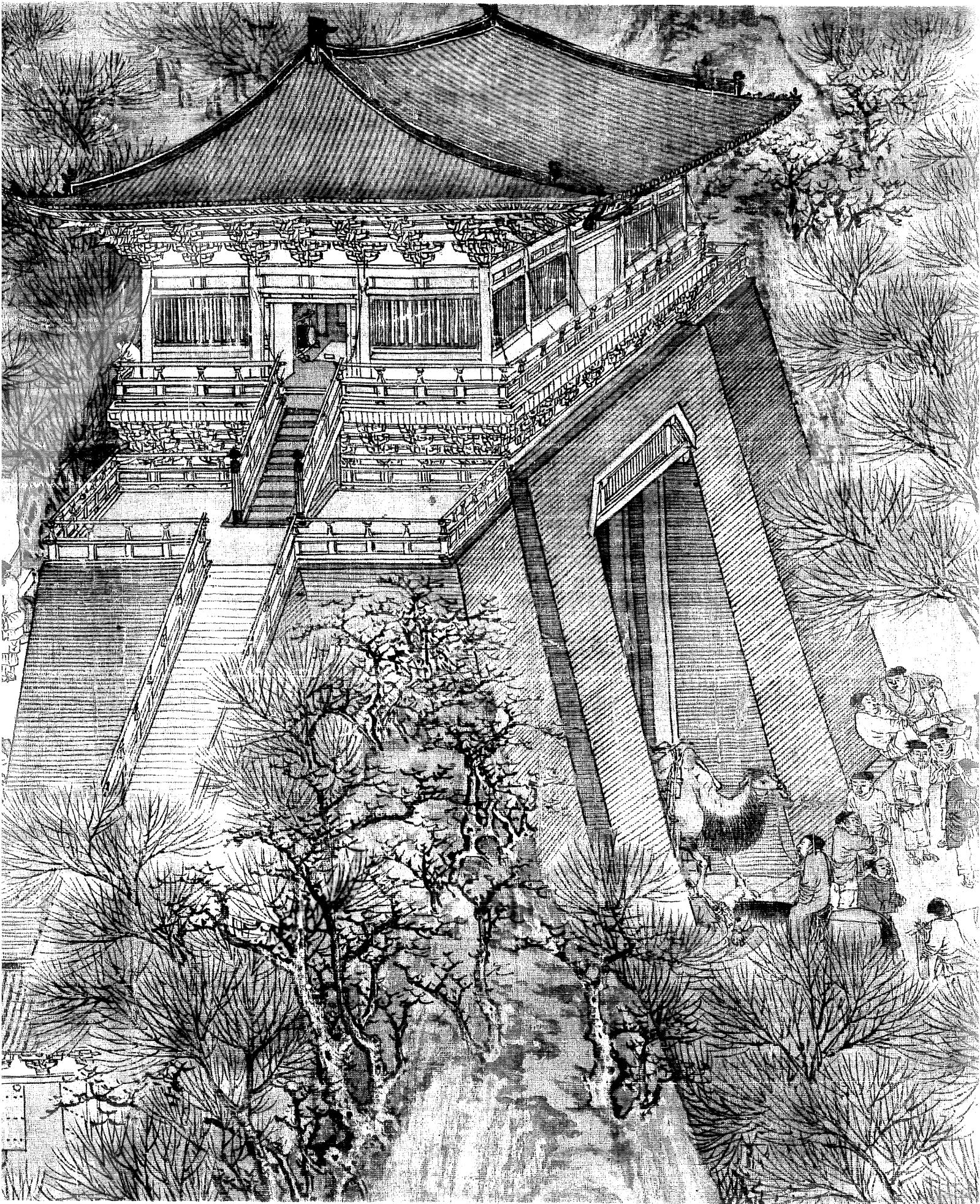
Section 20. The street widens to straddle a body of water, crossed by a bridge in the foreground. At the top of the section, on the right, stands a robed Buddhist monk with a shaved head. Behind him is the studded gate of a Buddhist temple, with statues of guardian deities on each side. Directly below the monk, under the willows, a group of five or six black pigs wanders.

In the foreground, bullocks pull two large covered carts crammed full of household goods. Going in the opposite direction, a woman in traveling hat holding a fan rides on horseback, and her servants gesture to the men guiding the bullocks. In the foreground, a man with a staff talks to an elderly woman, while a child with outstretched arms stands at their feet.

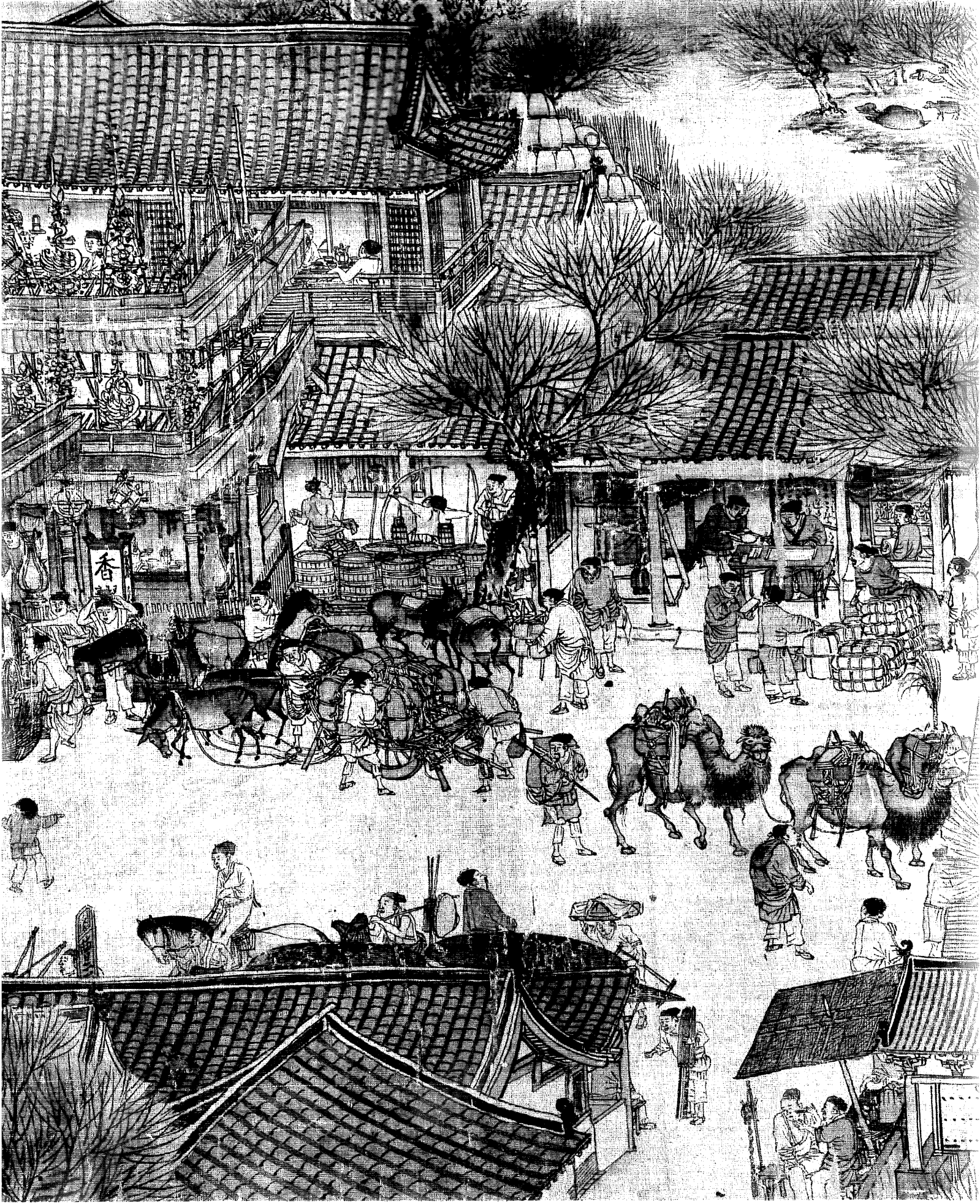


Section 21. The perspective widens to show a path far in the distance at the top of the scroll, where a sedan chair and figure on horseback pass a tavern.

On the near shore, the bridge offers a tableau of different social groups. Many of the robed men bearing kerchiefs are literati. In contrast, the laborers wear trousers so they can more easily pull their loads. A donkey helps two men with their center-wheeled wheelbarrow covered by a tarpaulin with indecipherable writing on it. Behind them follows another donkey bearing a woman who wears a veiled traveling hat.



Section 22. The gate to the city rises up to mark the climax of the final third of the scroll. Although the gate itself is faced with brick, the unguarded earthen wall in the foreground is surprisingly dilapidated, with trees and brush growing at its base. Only one figure stands on top of the gate. A tourist, he gazes at the people inside the wall, not outside, where a guard would look. Below him, laden camels proceed on their way to distant points in the deserts of northwest China.



Section 23. Now at street-level, a barber shaves his customer at a stall resting against the base of the wall. On the other side of the street, above the camels, merchants stand with their goods in front of an official writing at a table. They may be paying a value-added tax on the goods they are bringing into the city.

To the left, a man tests a bow in a barrel shop in front of the most elaborate structure shown in the scroll—a three-storeyed inn with the now-familiar trellis of a tavern. A laborer raising his arms obscures the second character of a sign whose first character reads “fragrant” and may offer fragrant wine. Just to the left of this sign, group of women stands in front of the inn by a large basket filled with brooms. Their proximity to the tavern suggests they might be prostitutes. A plump man, with a baby on his shoulders, supervises them closely.





Section 24. The massive tavern continues into this section, where its sign says “Wholesaler” (正店), a category for first-class establishments, without giving its actual name. To the left of the sign, several vendors sell snacks, and a sign above identifies a lamb shop owned by the Sun family (孫羊店). On the left corner of the inn a storyteller regales a small crowd of literati. Just behind him four horses pull a wheeled cart. At the top left is a cloth store, with a forward-wheel wheelbarrow in the upper left corner.

Two shops in the foreground have signs. One is a hotel, “Lord Wang’s Inn—Suitable for Long Stays” (久住王員外家) while the other advertises the “Li Family Shipping Company” (李家輸賣店).



Section 25. This crossroads shows the full range of social groups. At the bottom left a group of literati stands by a pawnshop, whose sign reads “release” (解). One figure guides a small child learning to walk. Donkeys pull a cart laden with two barrels—probably of wine. Directly above the cart a scholar talks to a Buddhist monk with a shaved head. Just to the right are two figures in long white robes, whose hair pins and hairstyle identify them as Daoists.

On the far side of the street, the large shop with imposing tiled roofs bears a sign: “The Liu Family Shop for Fine Sandalwood Furniture” (劉家上色沉檀棟?). Facing the street, a man selling religious figurines sits under umbrellas, while on the left edge of the section, two men draw water from a well. Directly underneath them, a peddler walks by carrying a wooden back-frame laden with toys.



Section 26. The street continues. On its far side, two women with their hair in buns consult a man. He may well be the pharmacist whose name appears on the sign above their heads: "Official Zhao's House" (趙太丞家). The other signs advertise cures for various ailments. The owner of the pharmacy lives in an elaborate house with a chimney and different courtyards. The left courtyard reveals an armchair placed in front of a calligraphic screen, while the right courtyard holds the bamboos and decorative rocks of his garden.

In the center of this section, a scholar in a traveler's hat, like a sombrero, rides a horse who walks behind the toy-seller. This distinctive figure (could it be the artist's self-portrait?) is about to enter the fully realized world of the scroll, which suddenly ends here.