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Re-dating the seven early Chinese Christian manuscripts : Christians in Dunhuang before 1200

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Author: Sun, Jianqiang

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Re-dating the Seven Early Chinese Christian Manuscripts

Christians in Dunhuang before 1200

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op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,

volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties te verdedigen op

woensdag 21 maart 2018 klokke 13:45

door

Jianqiang SUN

geboren te Tengzhou, China in 1980

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Chronology and Geography have been justly called the “eyes of History”, without the lights of which all is chaos and uncertainty; but perhaps a better simile would be, that Dates are to History, what the Latitude and Longitude are to Navigation, — fixing the exact position of, the objects to which they are applied.

— Harris Nicolas (1833:vi).

To
my parents
and
my niece, SUN Xinyi 孫心怡

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Timeline of China's dynasties

c. 2100-1600 BCE	Xia 夏
c. 1600-1050 BCE	Shang 商
c. 1046-256 BCE	Zhou 周 Western Zhou 西周 (<i>circa</i> 1046-771) Eastern Zhou 东周 (<i>circa</i> 771-256) Spring and Autumn Period 春秋 (<i>circa</i> 770- <i>circa</i> 475) Warring States Period 戰國 (<i>circa</i> 475-221)
221-206 BCE	Qin 秦
206 BCE-220 CE	Han 漢 Western Han 西漢 (206 BCE-9 CE) Interregnum of Wang Mang 王莽 (9-25) Eastern Han 東漢 (25-22)
220-589	Six Dynasties 六朝 Three Kingdoms 三國 (220-265) Jin Dynasty 晉 (265-420) Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝 (386-589)
581-618	Sui 隋
618-907	Tang 唐 Empress Wu's Zhou 武周 (690-705)
907-960	Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms 五代十國
960-1279	Song 宋 Northern Song 北宋 (960-1127) Southern Song 南宋 (1127-1279)
1271-1368	Yuan 元
1368-1644	Ming 明
1636-1912	Qing 清

Reigns of Tang emperors

Gaozu 高祖	618-626
Taizong 太宗	626-649
Gaozong 高宗	649-683
Zhongzong 中宗	683-684
Ruizong 睿宗	684-690
Empress Wu 武后	690-705
Zhongzong 中宗	705-710
Ruizong 睿宗	710-712
Xuanzong 玄宗	712-756
Suzong 肅宗	756-762
Daizong 代宗	762-779
Dezong 德宗	779-805
Shunzong 順宗	805
Xianzong 憲宗	805-820
Muzong 穆宗	820-824
Jingzong 敬宗	824-827
Wenzong 文宗	827-840
Wuzong 武宗	840-846
Xuanzong 宣宗	846-859
Yizong 懿宗	859-873
Xizong 僖宗	873-888
Zhaozong 昭宗	888-904
Aidi 哀帝	904-907

Abbreviations

b. born

d. died

r. reign

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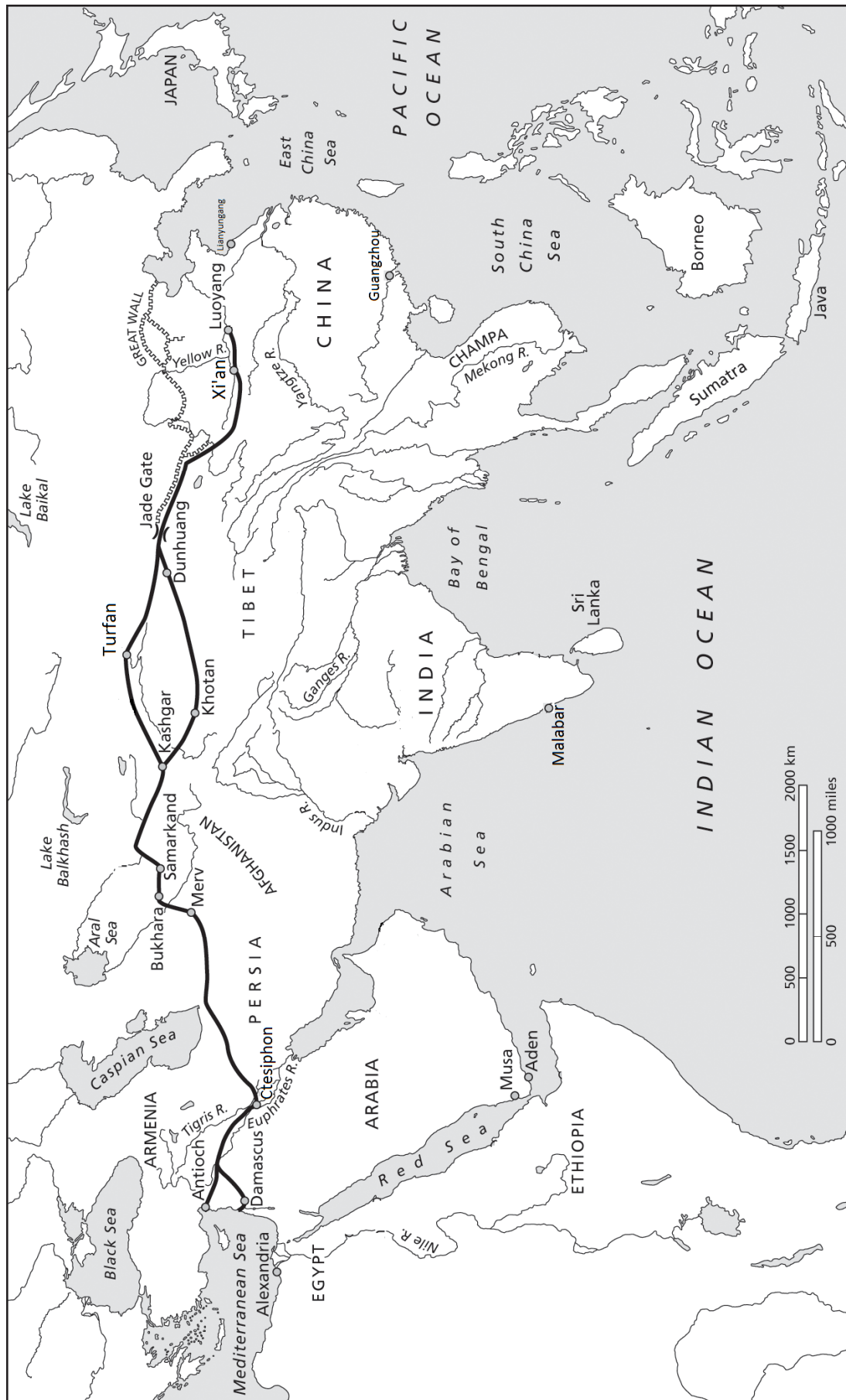
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Map 1 Cities along the Silk Road (Source: Xinru Liu 2015:459, adapted)

Stylistic matters

This study employs both traditional Chinese characters and the modern *Hanyu pinyin* system of transcription. As Chinese tones are not indicated in this system, and the tone-free transcriptions can be mismatched with other characters, this dissertation uses Chinese characters wherever they are relevant to the argument and gives an Asian author's full name in transcription and in the original characters. For the sake of consistency, western scholars are also mentioned by their full names. This research uses the name-date system in the footnotes and offers the full reference information in the Bibliography. In order to save space, the titles of Asian publications are not transcribed. Both footnotes and the Bibliography make a distinction between western literature and Asian publications. This research refers to Dunhuang Chinese manuscripts by their conventional catalogue numbers: S.2215 is manuscript number 2215 obtained by Aurel Stein and now held by the British Library; P.3847 is manuscript number 3847 collected by Paul Pelliot and now housed in Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Non-English quotations are all translated; the translation is followed by the original texts in brackets. All translations, punctuation, underlining, italics, column numbering and division (/), and other emphases are mine unless otherwise stated. Moreover, Chinese dates have been transferred into the Western (Gregorian) chronology via the Sino-Western Calendar Transfer Program offered by the Academia Sinica (<http://sinocal.sinica.edu.tw>). All internet publications were retrieved during the whole process of the research and were re-retrieved on August 17, 2017.

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This study would not have been written without the support and the help of many people. Some I have probably forgotten, and I sincerely apologize to those who are not mentioned here. Some I still recall, and I would like to list them here.

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This project has also benefit from many other people. They either sent me material or typed the difficult Chinese characters and Syriac words or gave advice to my Ph.D. application and research in Leiden or read some chapters — all mistakes that should remain, are mine: Chang Hsiangming 張向明, Chen Huaiyu 陳懷宇, Chen Ruixuan 陳瑞翹, Chen Zongli 陳宗利, Christien Kiewiet de Jong, Gao Ziwen 高子雯, Han Jianxia 韓建俠, Hidemi Takahashi 高橋英海, Jiang Tengfei 江騰飛, Li Xiaohu 李小虎, Liu Puning 劉璞寧, Liu Xiaojing 劉曉靜, Liu Zheng 劉錚, Mark Dickens, Matteo Nicolini-Zani, Miao Shengfa 苗聖法, Michael Radich, Nicholas Sims-Williams, Ren Baoyan 任寶彥, Rint Sybesma, Samuel N.C. Lieu, Song Changchun 宋長春, Sun Jianchun 孫建春, Tijmen Baarda, The East Asian Library and The Lipsius reception of Leiden University, Wu Yue 吳越, Xiu Xudong 修旭東, and Zhong Lei 鐘雷.

Introduction

1 Main question

This study reconsiders the chronology of seven early Chinese Christian religious manuscripts.¹ These manuscripts were found in China's remote western oasis, Dunhuang 敦煌, in 1900. Ever since their first publication, all have been accepted as the earliest statements of Christian faith in China, the first fruits of Sino-Christian relations and the inauguration of the translation of the Bible into Chinese. Together with a small dossier of evidence, they have also been used to establish China's earliest undisputed presence of Christianity, *Jingjiao* 景教, created by the Church of the East in 635 and allegedly extinguished during the Tang dynasty 唐朝 (618-907) sometime after 845.² More precisely, the eight named religious texts listed below, of which the last two are written together in one manuscript (P.3847), are believed to have been composed by the Tang Christians.³ Not a single text is claimed to have been made after the Tang court collapsed in 907.

To date, this timeframe still prevails. It can be found in almost all current publications, like the monographs written by doctoral researchers on the Tang church, chapters noted by historians of Christianity and sections sketched by all other sorts of experts.⁴ Although some scholars

¹ Since all sources, their historical background and earlier scholarly literature will be introduced in greater detail in Chapters 1, 2, and 6, this Introduction will use such phrases as 'see Chapter 1' only when absolutely necessary.

² This Chinese phrase is often translated into Luminous Teaching, hereafter the Tang church. *Jing* 景 is a key theological term frequently used by Christians to designate their faith, buildings and followers. The usage seems to be related to one of the character's basic meanings, light. In Chinese, the Tang church was also named the *Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教, in which *Daqin* supposedly refers to the country from which Christians originated. For more detail about these Chinese key phrases and designations, see Chapters 1 and 6. Moreover, the Church of the East goes by several names in the West — for example, the Nestorian church, the Syriac church and the Assyrian church. For a concise treatment of these appellations, see Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler (2003:1-5), Sebastian P. Brock (1996) and Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2011a:226-259).

³ With the exception of manuscript P.3847, scholars do not distinguish between (the composition of) texts and (the production of) manuscripts. The obvious reason is that most sources are too short and do not allow us to delve into this complex relationship. However, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are fairly long, and we are able to make this distinction. In Chapter 5, we shall rely on the composition of the texts to date these two manuscripts. In other words, with the exception of Chapter 5 and a few other places, the whole dissertation is discussing (the production of) manuscripts, NOT (the composition of) texts. Another problem is that these eight titles are difficult to decipher in spite of many efforts at exegesis. Their English versions are offered here only for reference. Hopefully, their translations will be standardized in the near future. For the latest attempts at exegesis, see Wang Lanping 王蘭平 (2016), Wu Changxing 吳昶興 (2015a), and Nie Zhijun 聶志軍 (2010). Note that this study follows Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2011b:314-321; 2003:124-127, 176-177, 190, 210, 350-402) in his counting of the characters and his numbering of the columns of all the manuscripts.

⁴ For example, not a single paper contained in the four volumes that were produced as the outcome of the triennial Salzburg symposia on the Church of the East is devoted to examining the chronology of these manuscripts. This symposium was first convened in 2003 and so far it has been held five times (2016, 2013, 2009, 2006, 2003). For the four volumes, see Li Tang and Dietmar W. Winkler (2016, 2013), Dietmar W. Winkler and Li Tang (2009), and Roman Malek (2006). For doctoral projects on the Tang church, see R. Todd Godwin (2016), Li Tang (2004), Peter C.H. Chiu (1987), Wang Lanping 王蘭平 (2016), Nie Zhijun 聶志軍 (2010), Liu Zhenning 劉振寧 (2007) and Zeng Yangqing 曾陽晴 (2005). For chapters and sections contained in doctoral works, see Toshikazu S. Foley (2009:6-16), Jingyi Ji (2007:23-80), Sangkeun Kim (2004:120-127). For other

have occasionally tried to assign different specific years to each manuscript (text) over the past 100 years or so, such revisions as there are have been slight and minor, and have never departed significantly from the traditional chronology. Below, I provide a summary of the conventional timeline that will be the subject of a critical examination in this study:⁵

1. Two sources were created in the 640s by Aluoben 阿羅本, the first known missionary who arrived at Chang'an 長安 (the modern Xi'an 西安), the then capital of Tang China, in 635. Commonly labeled the Aluoben Documents, they were first published by the Japanese scholar Haneda Toru around the 1920s.⁶

The Messiah Sutra 序聽迷詩所經, that is dated between 635 and 638 and has 2,845 characters;

On One God 一神論, that is dated 641 and contains 6,949 characters.

2. Two manuscripts, often associated with a mysterious Japanese collector Kojima Yasushi 小島靖, bear a date in the 720s. Both sources were first examined in 1949 by Peter Yoshiro Saeki, a great Japanese scholar of the Tang church who had been baptized into the Anglican-Episcopal Church of Japan.⁷

Kojima Manuscript A is *The Praise of a Great Saint, Pervading Truth and Conversion to the Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教大聖通真歸法讚. It has been dated to the year 720 and is eighteen columns long.

Kojima Manuscript B is *The Sutra of the Origin of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教宣元至本經. It has been assigned to the year 717. Only its final thirty columns have survived.

3. Four texts that were written in the late eighth century or around the year 781 when the Christian priest Jingjing 景淨 composed the famous Chinese-Syriac bilingual Xi'an Stele 景教碑. They are known as the Jingjing Documents:

publications, see Daniel H. Bays (2012:7-11), Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (1999:265-285), Samuel Hugh Moffett (1998:288-323) and Wu Changxing 吳昶興 (2015b).

⁵ This timeline has often been summarized by researchers who survey the whole field of the Tang church. Cf. Pénélope Riboud (2015:47-48, 2001:1-42), Matteo Nicolini-Zani (2006:35-36) and Wu Changxing 吳昶興 (2015c: lxx-lxxi).

⁶ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1931, 1926, 1923, 1918.

⁷ He also publishes in Japanese under his native name, 佐伯好郎 (Saeki Yoshiro). In the English works, he prefers to use the initials of his Christian name, P.Y. Saeki. In this study, therefore, he and his works including those written in Japanese, will also be referred to as by 'P.Y. Saeki'. These two manuscripts were inserted as appendices in the book *Christianity in China: the Qing Dynasty* 清時代の支那基督教 published in Japanese. This study refers to the reprinted version of this book (1979). For P.Y. Saeki's contribution to the field, see below.

The Mysterious Bliss Sutra 志玄安樂經 (2,596 characters), that was first published by Haneda Toru in 1929;

The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao 大秦景教宣元本經 (465 characters), that was first studied by P.Y. Saeki in 1934;

The Praise of the Three Majestics 景教三威蒙度讚 (327 characters), that together with the following source, was discovered by Paul Pelliot in 1908;

The Sutra of Reverence 尊經, that is 277 characters long.⁸

Despite this apparent consensus, the traditional chronology is by no means settled. Fairly recently, a few other modern scholars, whose works will be referenced below, have already observed that the common dating is uncertain. For instance, in his article presented to the first Salzburg Symposium on the Church of the East, “Past and Current Research on Tang Jingjiao Documents: A Survey”, Matteo Nicolini-Zani points out: “In summary, we can say that the traditional position [of Chinese Christian manuscripts] was based on an almost uncritical acceptance of a small amount of uncertain data and on the passive transmission of many unfounded assumptions.”⁹ Probably because these scholars have not really pursued the problem any further, nor have they proposed a new chronology, their voices have remained marginal, even though we have seen a resurgence in published research on the Tang church over the past twenty years or so.

Nevertheless, these recent observations are a source of inspiration. Indisputably, the chronology of the Chinese Christian manuscripts is, as said, still far from certain. As they are analyzed below, most common arguments do not stand up to scrutiny. In general, the argumentation is plagued by defects that range from the impressionistic and cursory treatment of the alleged textual and historical evidence to faulty reasoning and to fallacious presuppositions. For instance, the dating of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* can even be proved wrong by the empirical findings — see Chapter 3. In addition to analyses of the specific traditional arguments offered in the following chapters, three major, more general criticisms need to be addressed in the introductory part of this dissertation.

First and foremost, the traditional chronology has never been substantiated. Any pertinent information relevant to determining the date (including the authorship) of each text (manuscript) is in fact extremely sparse, if it exists at all. The manuscripts themselves contain

⁸ P.Y. Saeki 1934b; Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1929.

⁹ Matteo Nicolini-Zani 2006:38.

little explicit information about the time of their production. The majority of them give no indication of either their dates or their authors. The only two dated and assigned sources, the Kojima manuscripts, are of questionable authenticity, and one strong argument, discussed in Chapter 6, is that their assigned dates are difficult to reconcile with their linguistic peculiarities. Moreover, among these texts, only *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* can be confirmed to have once been used in Tang political centers. In 2006, the other version was discovered carved on the Luoyang Pillar 洛陽經幢 that was erected in the 820s. However, the two versions do differ slightly, and their origins and dispersion remain largely unknown.

Even more significantly, no information about the production of these Chinese Christian manuscripts can be extrapolated from other contemporaneous sources that are, when it is all said and done, very limited.¹⁰ Chinese texts, both official and private, mention the Tang church only sporadically. As far as is known at present, not a single document has ever mentioned a Christian text. Turning to the horse's mouth is no help as church records are even sparser than Chinese documents. To the best of my knowledge, not one single record that clearly documents the Church of the East dispatching a delegation to Tang China has survived, let alone any mention of Christians translating texts into Chinese and indeed making and using these seven extant manuscripts.

As a matter of fact, the only indication of the use of the Tang Christian texts that we can find today, if we can call it indication, is tenuous at best. The information is extremely brief and is contained in the eighty-five-characters-long colophon of manuscript P.3847, that is quoted at the very beginning of Chapter 6. This colophon states that Aluoben and Jingjing translated thirty-five texts, whose titles are listed in *The Sutra of Reverence*. However, the colophon does not specify who composed which particular text. Even if we were to rely on what it says and assume that Tang Christians did use the thirty-five texts, only one listed title, 'The Mysterious Bliss Sutra' (志玄安樂經), exactly matches the heading of one of the surviving eight texts.¹¹ Since it is the only example in which the titles can be matched to each other, extreme caution should be exercised if we are to make the claim that the extant manuscript of *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* is the exact version listed in *The Sutra of Reverence* as being used by Tang Christians.

¹⁰ Source scarcity has been acknowledged and will be demonstrated in Chapter 1. For this acknowledgement, see Matteo Nicolini-Zani (2013a).

¹¹ The other listed title 'The Sutra of the Origin of the Origins' (宣元至本經) appears to be identical to the shortened title of Kojima Manuscript B. It also varies slightly from the heading of the surviving text *The Sutra of Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*.

Secondly, the idea that the manuscripts were composed in Chang'an by Aluoben and Jingjing and eventually sent to the remote oasis of Dunhuang is a hazardous assumption that in its turn has already tempted scholars to utilize these Christian sources to analyze the whole Tang church. However, the question of to what degree that we can utilize them to examine the Christian presence in a much larger geographical area (China) is certainly a matter that needs to be addressed before we proceed any further. Somewhat extravagantly, as these Chinese Christian sources seem to have been artificially isolated from other sorts of Christian sources found in Dunhuang, they have been used indiscriminately to analyze the whole Tang church. Nevertheless, so far, we do not possess any record that attests that a known Christian document was made in the Tang capital. The problem is compounded by the fact that Dunhuang was under siege for ten years before being conquered by the Tibetan Empire in 787 and only nominally came under the rule of the Tang court when Tang loyalists overthrew the Tibetans in 848, after which it maintained a relationship of suzerainty with the Chinese central government.¹² As a matter of fact, this small oasis has yielded significantly more sources that exceed those found in the Tang heartland in terms of diversity and quantity. When put together, all the local sources reveal a picture that emerges as rather different from what is commonly believed. It seems that Christians remained uninterruptedly in Dunhuang from the eighth century well up into the early twelfth century. Therefore, as argued in Chapter 6, the Dunhuang Christians must be understood in their own terms. It seems we shall probably need to adjust our research and embrace a local perspective if we are to examine all the Christian sources, including the Chinese religious manuscripts, properly.

Thirdly, the conventional timeline has never been thoroughly questioned. It was devised by modern scholars in the early twentieth century. All specific dates were first systemically explicated by P.Y. Saeki in his book published in 1937, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, "the only [English] monograph that covers all the Tang Christian documents and provides the basis for our current historical assessments of Tang Christianity".¹³ P.Y. Saeki's investigation of the dates, although it was and still is the most extensive discussion available, amounts to little more than thirty pages in total.¹⁴ As the criticism in Chapter 2 implies, his

¹² The reasons Dunhuang was besieged for ten years are complex. One interesting cause is that the Tibetan court seems to have been deeply concerned about the potential damage that might have been inflicted on Dunhuang Buddhism. For general surveys of Dunhuang under Tibetan rule, see Gertraud Taenzer (2012), Sam van Schaik (2011:26-30) and Yang Ming 楊銘 (1997).

¹³ Johan Ferreira 2014:2. P.Y. Saeki's book is in two versions that do not greatly diverge. Besides minor rephrasing and corrections, the most obvious difference is that the 1951 edition incorporates the Kojima manuscripts. This dissertation refers to the 1951 edition unless otherwise stated.

¹⁴ P.Y. Saeki 1951:8-9, 113-124, 248-265; 1937:8-9, 113-124, 248-265. For more detail about P.Y. Saeki's dating and my critiques, see Chapters 2 and 6.

argumentation cannot withstand scrutiny, and certain of his arguments are based on unfounded assumptions. Admittedly, there are some other attempts to date the sources in addition to P.Y. Saeki's explication. But, as said, all are minor revisions that do not stand up to closer scrutiny. Take for instance the common reason for the assertion that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were created and presented to Tang Taizong by Aluoben around the 640s. This reason is based on the possibility derived from this historical event: Aluoben translated certain texts into Chinese and discussed them with Tang Taizong who was convinced that Aluoben's faith could not do his empire any harm and finally permitted the diffusion of Christianity in Tang China in 638 by issuing an edict to this effect. Moreover, it rests upon this unfounded assumption: the obscure texts such as *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* must have been composed by a foreigner like Aluoben who had then only just arrived in China and was still very unfamiliar with Chinese.¹⁵ Importantly, this reason, though widely accepted, is awkward. It would have us believe that, even though Aluoben and his team did not have the requisite command of Chinese, they would still have possessed enough linguistic skill to have translated *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, that are the longest among the surviving manuscripts, into that language. However, if these two texts are as difficult as they are commonly believed to be, it is puzzling to understand why Christians would have submitted such incomprehensible texts to Tang Taizong. Even if Aluoben did compose these difficult texts, one still has to wonder how Tang Taizong would have managed to understand them.¹⁶

All that has just been said suggests that the conventional chronology of these manuscripts rests precariously on extremely tenuous circumstantial information. The production of the Chinese Christian manuscripts or texts still remains a mystery on which only the tip of the veil has been lifted. Various important aspects, like their provenance, authorship, usage, dissemination, reception and so forth have not yet been determined. The persistence of the traditional dating is largely the result of the fact that more recent commentators have simply reproduced the findings and intuitions of the first generations of experts.

¹⁵ The obscurity of the texts, the chronology of the sources and the foreigners' linguistic incompetence were first associated together by Haneda Toru 羽田亨 (1931, 1926, 1923, 1918) when he introduced the two manuscripts to the world. However Haneda Toru only discussed the association in passing. He never explicitly claimed that the author was Aluoben. Nonetheless, the first-generation scholars already accepted this association and specified that it was Aluoben who made these two sources. For example, John Foster (1939:44-45) and F.S. Drake (1935a: 679).

¹⁶ P.Y. Saeki (1951) might recognize the awkwardness of this reason. On one hand, he relied on Aluoben's translation activity to establish possibilities of creating these two manuscripts. On the other hand, he avoided mentioning the obscurity of the texts. In fact, I am not aware that he ever made serious complaints about the difficulties of interpreting the sources.

Looking at the persistence of the traditional dating, it must be conceded that there are two good reasons for this practice. The first reason is the inaccessibility of the original manuscripts. All manuscripts were unobtainable for a long time after World War II. Since the end of the 1940s, all other documents, with the exception of manuscript P.3847, have been kept locked away in secret after their removal from China to Japan. Excluding the collectors and Haneda Toru, only a handful of scholars have ever had the opportunity to study the original rolls. Even P.Y. Saeki, as far as can be inferred from the information available, never had the chance to examine any original manuscripts. To date, *The Messiah Sutra*, *On One God*, *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* are still inaccessible, although their custodian, the Takeda Science Foundation 武田科学振興財団, did open the doors of its Osaka library (the Kyou shooku 杏雨書屋) in 2010 and exhibited them to the public for the first time in 100 years. It also took this opportunity to re-photograph all its holdings in the series *Dunhuang Secret Collections* 敦煌秘笈.¹⁷ Moreover, the original Kojima manuscripts, as discussed in Chapter 6, were lost, and only their photos have been preserved. Nonetheless, the inaccessibility of all the original manuscripts, as observed by scholars, has been a major impediment to research, forcing almost all scholars to quote P.Y. Saeki's and Haneda Toru's transcriptions, translations and publications, including their errors.¹⁸

Another complicating factor is that the conventional chronology and the common understanding of the pre-twelfth-century presence of Christians in China are inextricably interlocked. As said in Chapter 1, Christians enjoyed a period of prosperity for some time under Tang patronage. After they had built the first church in Chang'an in 638, the Tang Christians seem to have constructed more buildings in several other places, even though these edifices, it is said, were demolished in the midst of the rising xenophobia epitomized by an edict issued in 845 to curb the so-called non-Chinese religions (including, and presumably, targeting Buddhism especially). As few post-Tang sources document the activities of Christians, not a single Christian, it is widely assumed, remained in China's heartland between the tenth and the eleventh century, and the Bible was read again in the Far East only after

¹⁷ In total, this foundation has published ten volumes (including one volume of catalogue information), and printed 250 non-commercial copies that are sent, free of charge, to noted scholars and institutions all over the world. For information about how this foundation collected, kept and published Dunhuang documents, see Zheng Acai 鄭阿財 (2013). Furthermore, a Chinese scholar, Chen Tao 陳濤 (2012), visited the exhibition (April 19-24).

¹⁸ For the consequences of the inaccessibility and the (re)-appearances of these four manuscripts, see Matteo Nicolini-Zani (2016). For these modern errors, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:146-155, 162-170, 192-193). In addition, A.C. Moule (1940:5) once commented that P.Y. Saeki's English translations "are loose, vague, and sometimes make one smile, while his ideas and notes often lack critical feeling". For more criticism and the wide acceptance of P.Y. Saeki's study, see Johan Ferreira (2014:2), Max Deeg (2006:115) and Matteo Nicolini-Zani (2006).

Franciscans and Dominicans sailed to China in the thirteenth century. The upshot is that these eight Chinese Christian texts are taken to be the sources used the Tang Christians. In its turn, their chronology reinforces the common understanding of China's pre-twelfth-century Christianity, a position that will be challenged in the concluding part of this study.

Leaving aside these more recondite considerations, a more reasoned timeline of these Chinese Christian manuscripts is obviously a crucial matter to anyone interested in the early history of Christianity in China. The chronology of ancient manuscripts is an issue central to the entire field. Dates anchor manuscripts in the flow of time, offering the proper time frames into which studies can be slotted. More often than not, dating is the very pillar of historical research. It is one of the most fundamental areas that need to be clarified before any general point is pressed. If a manuscript is wrongly dated, it is wrongly used. Cause is confounded with effect or vice-versa. More common conclusions will be founded on false premises. Until the chronological problem is settled, no satisfactory research, whether it be historical or theological or textual or cultural, can be undertaken. Only with a sound timeline will it be possible to draw inferences from the Chinese Christian manuscripts about the so-called Tang church, and to produce an accurate overall historical sketch of Christianity in medieval China.

Therefore, this study embraces an empirical, philological, historical approach and attempts to find solid bases on which to establish a more reliable timeline for these sources. In simple words, this research re-dates the manuscripts of early Christianity in China.

More specifically, this dissertation is concerned with *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. The main reason for this focus is that they feature much more prominently than any other manuscript in the current discussion on the history of Christianity in medieval China. In terms of length, they are the longest of the manuscripts. All other five sources combined are just a little bit longer than *The Messiah Sutra* alone, and much shorter than *On One God*. In terms of chronology, according to the traditional view, they are the oldest Christian manuscripts and the only known seventh-century religious texts. Moreover, these two manuscripts were written by the same hand.

The other manuscripts will also be examined, but more briefly. Each one of them presents its own unique problems. The Kojima manuscripts have been exposed as modern forgeries by Chinese scholars whose voices still remain marginal in the West. This study supports their findings and will also condemn them as recent forgeries, by adding a few more pieces of significant evidence to what earlier experts have already adduced. *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra*

and *The Praise of the Three Majestics* were also written by the same hand. This study finds their common conventional dating acceptable, although it hopes to refine it with more detailed evidence. The colophon attached to *The Praise of the Three Majestics* and *The Sutra of Reverence*, is quite definite that they (manuscript P.3847) were made after the Tang dynasty had collapsed in 907. Given these special conditions, this dissertation will deal with these five manuscripts collectively in Chapter 6. In time, more detailed examination will have to be conducted; ones that will do justice to each manuscript and to China's ancient Christians.

2 Methods of dating sources and research scope

Many dating methods and criteria have been advanced, ranging from the traditional techniques of extracting paleographical, codicological, philological and historical information to cutting-edge laboratory work like Carbon-14 dating and non-destructive technologies (NDT).¹⁹ In the light of the current inaccessibility of the manuscripts, it is not possible to date Chinese Christian manuscripts using modern technologies. Therefore, this research will adopt traditional methods, making use of the most recent photos. The following section begins with general considerations before it introduces the four main techniques used in this dissertation. As it does so, it will outline the scope of the research.

First and foremost, this research takes it for granted that a manuscript was not made in a vacuum. The various features of a manuscript contain temporal and spatial information that often allow it to be dated. This assumption is not at all new. Modern scholars already make the basic distinction between the text in the manuscript and the materiality of the manuscript, paying attention not only to the text but also to decorations, bindings, layouts and many other aspects inherent in the document. Lately, a growing number of researchers have been studying manuscripts as material objects, cultural products and historical artifacts. The rise of a new field of Manuscript Studies has already yielded an important new vocabulary, replete with a number of analytical terminologies like "Manuscript Cultures" and "Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts".²⁰ As these latest developments point out, the production of a manuscript should not be seen as static. Rather, it was a complex, dynamic process that involved contents, authors, patrons, scribes, editors, binders, distributors, readers and so on.

¹⁹ In the past, not all manuscripts could be dated. Small pieces often do not contain adequate information and cannot be examined using traditional methods. Thanks to modern technologies, however, today even scraps can be dated, although there are some demanding requirements, for example, samples should not be contaminated. For concise overviews of various dating methods, see Alessandro Bausi and Jost Gippert (2015:27-30), Natalie Tchernetska (2009:748-756), and Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham (2007:121).

²⁰ Michael Friedrich and Cosima Schwarke 2016; Jörg Quenzer *et al.* 2014. For the latest developments in this new area, see Giovanni Ciotti and Hang Lin (2016), Alessandro Bausi and Jost Gippert (2015), and Michael Johnston and Michael Van Dussen (2015).

The making of the manuscript also had to comply with the prevailing societal norms and practices, including technologies. The whole production process, therefore, was heavily influenced, if not completely determined, by contemporaneous needs or milieus, although different parties like owners, copyists and collectors, might have made some impact on the bases of their own interests, inclinations and habits.²¹ A manuscript, it is agreed, is a product of a society or context. For today's scholars, in this sense a manuscript is a time capsule: its various aspects reflect the past general environments, and have a lot to tell about the chronology of the manuscript.

These more general codicological aspects having been established, in its attempt to date these early Chinese Christian manuscripts this research begins by exploring specific historical events. Two events are of particular interest. The first is the recorded historical presence of Christianity in China. As will be discussed in Chapter 1, it is possible that some Christians who were involved in long-distance trade did enter China before the seventh century. However, there is no hard evidence to affirm their presence, especially not that such occasional visits bore fruit in the form of any stable Christian communities. It is inconceivable that an individual Christian who had arrived in China would have been equipped with a theological training adequate to have translated or composed these religious texts, or indeed that a small group of believers would have needed to make these Chinese manuscripts, especially the very long ones like *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. These manuscripts could only have been produced when there was a Christian community in China that was stable and sizable enough to need religious texts in Chinese to nourish its faith. Therefore, this dissertation assumes that these sources were not made before the rise of the Tang church. As will be outlined in Chapter 1, the emergence and growth of the Tang church can be divided into three periods: arrival-diffusion (635-649), expansion-setback-recovery (649-790s) and disappearance (800-840s). This periodization provides a thread that will be followed in the three main chapters.

The second crucial historical event is the sealing off of Dunhuang Cave 17, in which all the seven Christian manuscripts were allegedly found. This cave, also known as the Cave of Stored Sutras 藏經洞, is 2.6 meters (L) x 2.6 meters (W) x 3 meters (H). It is one of a complex of caves carved out of the cliffs by devout locals, the majority of whom were Buddhists. It was originally built as a memorial chapel dedicated to the eminent monk, Hongbian 洪辯, who died in the 860s. Sometime in the very early eleventh century, for some mysterious reason

²¹ For manuscript production before photocopying, see Eltjo Buringh (2011), Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham (2007), Barbara Rhodes and William Wells Streeter (1999), and Qian Cunxun 錢存訓 (1992).

this small cave was stuffed with manuscripts (more than 50,000 of them, the earliest of which were dated to the fourth century), ritual objects, textiles, prints, paintings and so on. Once it was sealed, it lay abandoned until *circa* 1900, when a Daoist priest accidentally re-opened it and all the materials in it were dispersed around the world and initiated a new research area, Dunhuang Studies.²²

A number of theories have been proposed to explain the exact time of and the reasons for the sealing off of the cave.²³ Aurel Stein, the first European explorer to visit this spot in 1907, suggested that given the variety of materials the cave had been used as a waste repository. Paul Pelliot, who arrived shortly after Aurel Stein, postulated that Buddhist monks hid their belongings hastily just before the Tanguts conquered Dunhuang in 1035. One of the arguments he put forward is that not a single text is written in the Tangut script. Recently, Rong Xinjiang has proposed that local monasteries filled the cave with their items and walled it up when they learnt that the Islamic Karakhanid power had sacked the Buddhist kingdom of Khotan in 1006 and seemed to be on the verge of expanding farther eastward. Whatever the reason was, it seems that Cave 17 was indeed closed off not long after 1002. The evidence for this is provided by the latest dated manuscript, F.32, that is currently held in St. Petersburg. Its colophon states that this Buddhist source was made on the orders of the Dunhuang governor and was then deposited in a monastery in 1002.²⁴ Since the dated sources before this year continue uninterrupted and the date of other, presumably later, manuscripts cannot be confirmed, the early years of the eleventh century are taken as *terminus ante quem* for the closure of Cave 17 and consequently for the making of all the Dunhuang treasures.

In the light of these two events, this research spans a period from 635 to the early eleventh century, presuming that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* and the other Chinese Christian manuscripts were made within this time span. In order to arrive at a more detailed dating, this dissertation employs three other methods.

The first of these has to do with the Chinese tradition of tabooing emperors' (given) names, *bihui* 避諱, a practice often translated as name taboo.²⁵ This method is one of the most common techniques for dating Chinese texts. In ancient China the use of the names of the emperors of the ruling dynasty or, more precisely, the Chinese characters that happen to be

²² For the re-opening and the disposal and description of these treasures, see Rong Xinjiang (2013:79-176). For the latest snapshot of Dunhuang Studies, see Imre Galambos (2016), Irina Popova and Liu Yi (2012).

²³ For a concise summary, see Sha Wutian 沙武田 (2001:69-77) and Liu Jinbao 劉進寶 (2000).

²⁴ For more detail including the translation of this colophon, see Rong Xinjiang (2013:109-131).

²⁵ I am not aware of that the Chinese tabooed the surnames of the royal families. That is, this dissertation only deals with the forenames of the emperors.

(part of) the emperor's first names, was strongly discouraged. In coming to terms with this demanding tradition, Chinese people invented a number of methods that enabled them to use these characters without violating the custom, thereby offending their supreme leaders and suffering any subsequent punishment. The upshot was that certain known characters were intentionally modified, removed or substituted on a large scale. Relying on the name taboo practice, scholars generally assume that, whenever such a tabooed character is present, the source must be dated somewhere between the corresponding emperor's reign and the end of his dynasty. If a certain emperor's name is not avoided, the source was probably produced either before the enthronement of that ruler, or after the collapse of his house. This well-attested, enduring Chinese tradition has given birth to the rise of a new research area, Studies of Name Taboo. Lately, it has been systematically introduced to the West by Piotr Adamek.²⁶ I shall pay particular attention to this method in Chapter 3.

A second strong indicator of a source's chronology is the use or non-use of the Empress Wu's new forms. Between the end of 689 and 697, the Empress Wu, the only Chinese female who ever assumed the title Emperor 皇帝, modified the common way of writing a number of characters and promoted the new orthographic forms with complex political, ideological motivations in mind. These new forms were widely used during her reign but quickly fell into general disuse after 705 when she was overthrown by a *coup d'état*. As these forms differ radically from their common orthographies, they serve as a rather useful method for dating sources. Whenever these forms are encountered, scholars often confidently claim that the source was made in Empress Wu's reign, even though some forms were still used sporadically well up into the eleventh century, and even later. This method has also been used by Western researchers like Imre Galambos.²⁷ I shall employ it in Chapter 4.

Another way of dating manuscripts relies on evidence for the time of the composition of the texts in the manuscripts. It goes without saying that the manuscripts that have come down to us cannot have been made earlier than the period in which their texts were created. Therefore the time of the composition of the texts must be taken as *terminus post quem* for the production of the manuscripts. When examining the time at which a text was created, a useful method is to investigate its linguistic features. Historical linguistics has shown that language is constantly changing, evolving and adapting to the needs of its users. Over time, a language's morphological, semantic, syntactic and other elements in one period will differ from features in another period. In other words, each period of language has its own

²⁶ Piotr Adamek 2015.

²⁷ Imre Galambos 2012.

morphological, semantic and syntactical features. These features are characteristics that define the language of a period and will not be found in language of another period. In turn, these linguistic features of a source will indicate to which period the language contained in that source belongs, shedding great light on the earliest possible time at which the texts in their current version could first have been created.

These language changes have often been utilized by scholars to examine sources. Famously, in the fifteenth century, Lorenzo Valla relied on such indicators to demonstrate that a presumed fourth-century decree in which the Roman emperor Constantine had transferred authority over Rome and the western part of the Roman Empire to the Pope, the *Donation of Constantine*, was a forgery. He observes, for instance, that the text referred to high-ranking Roman officials by the term ‘satraps’. He writes: “I cannot recall reading that anyone, either in Rome or even in the provinces of the Romans, was ever named a satrap [in the fourth century].”²⁸

Relying on similar lines of research, this study examines the time of the composing of the Christian texts, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. Although both the Chinese writing system and the Chinese language make it impossible to use the same lines of reasoning Lorenzo Valla applies to his Latin text to the Chinese Christian texts, this study will venture into the field of syntax in its exploration of widely observed changes in the construction of the Chinese passive.

Historically, the Chinese passive construction has undergone significant changes. Several passive markers have been introduced at different times, subsequently pushing earlier markers out of usage one after the other. There seems to have been one dominant marker in various definable periods. Speaking retrospectively, therefore, the rise and fall of different markers is explicit as is indicated by the rich qualitative data collected by many historical linguists who are aided by statistics software. In addition, the usage of a specific marker also evolved, expanding from simplicity to complexity as new orders or sequences were introduced. Given the general evolutionary spectrum of the Chinese passive and the observable changes in each marker, passive constructions in a text can shed light on the time of creation of the text, and in turn this determines the time at which the manuscript can first have been produced. The evolution of the Chinese passive construction has been scrutinized

²⁸ Lorenzo Valla 2007:67-69. Etymologically, the word ‘satrap’, meaning governor of a province, was introduced from Old Persian. In addition, Lorenzo Valla also examined other aspects like style. Today, it is commonly agreed that this forgery was made in “the second half of the eighth century”. For more details, see Raymond John Acciardo, Sr. (2007), Wolfram Brandes (2007) and Johannes Fried (2007).

by such scholars as Alain Peyraube, and it also has been utilized by scholars like Yuan Bin as an instrument for dating sources.²⁹ Chapter 5 discusses and adopts this method.

3 Dissertation structure

These lines of research govern the organization of this dissertation. Besides the Introduction and the Conclusion, it consists of six chapters, of which the most important are devoted to the question of the dating of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*.

Chapter 1 discusses the traditional narrative of China's pre-twelfth-century Christians, in which all surviving Chinese Christian manuscripts have always been accorded a place. Chapter 2 describes *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, shows that the suspicion of forgery can be abandoned and critically examines their conventional chronology. Chapter 3 elucidates the reason their traditional dating must be wrong. Building on this argument, Chapter 4 demonstrates that it is not possible that the two manuscripts could have been made between the 650s and the 760s. Chapter 5 argues that the two texts were composed not earlier than the ninth-tenth century, suggesting that the manuscripts were produced somewhere between the ninth and the eleventh century. Chapter 6 investigates five other Christian manuscripts. Furthermore, this chapter associates archeological finds and non-Chinese Christian manuscripts from Dunhuang, sketching a larger historical context in which all the Christian sources, Chinese and non-Chinese, can be better positioned. Finally, this dissertation wraps up the findings, proposing a new timeline for the Chinese Christian manuscripts. It also highlights some implications of the new dating and lays out directions for further research.

²⁹ Alain Peyraube 1989; Yuan Bin 袁賓 2000.

Chapter 1 The traditional narrative of China's pre-twelfth-century Christians

In the country *Daqin*, the Great Virtue named Aluoben, [...] reached Chang'an in the ninth year of the Zhenguan reign [635]. (大秦國有上德曰阿/羅本 [.....] 貞觀九祀至於長安)

— *The Xi'an Stele* (781)¹

The Foreign Ministry will document [other] monks and nuns and clearly indicate their foreign teachings. The three thousand strong *Daqin* [Christians], *Muhu* [Muslims?] and Zoroastrians will resume lay life and cease to confound Chinese customs. (隸僧尼屬主客，顯明外國之教。勒大秦 [、] 穆護、袄三千餘人還俗，不雜中華之風。)

— *The Chinese Intolerance Edict* (845)²

The mentions of Christianity in contemporary Chinese authors of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries are very few, and what there are are either extremely vague or refer definitely to an already distant past, and we believe that nothing has yet been found to suggest that there were Christians surviving in China during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

— A.C. Moule (1870-1957)³

These three excerpts give a rough indication of China's pre-twelfth-century Christians, in which the seven Chinese Christian manuscripts are conventionally placed: Christians led by Aluoben, it is argued, first reached China in 635, and were extinguished after 845. To understand this traditional historiography better, this chapter begins by discrediting the theories that propose that Christianity might have been introduced into China prior to 635, and then reiterates that the earliest presence in China is the Tang church by presenting affirmative evidence to back up this claim. Finally, the chapter introduces the popular picture of the Tang church depicted by mainstream scholars.

1.1 Possible Christian presence in pre-Tang China and expansion of the Church of the East

It is not known when Christianity first entered China. There are rumors, legends and possibilities, all of which suggest that Christianity might have been introduced into China anytime between the first century and the sixth century. However, these theories rest on tenuous indications drawn either from such legends as that about Thomas working in Asia in the first century, or from knowledge about the earliest Sino-Roman contacts that are mentioned in historical sources, or from the legendary role the Silk Road played in facilitating

¹ For column numbering of this Stele, this dissertation follows Paul Pelliot (1996: Fig.2, Cols. 10-11).

² Liu Xu 劉煦 945/1975:605.

³ A.C. Moule 1930:73.

East-West cultural exchanges. None of these is based on solid evidence.⁴ The most reasonable scenario is that the Church of the East gradually expanded to the Far East and introduced Christianity to China before 635 and, at the present stage of knowledge, this scenario still cannot be dismissed from the realms of possibility.

1.1.1 The Church of the East in the pre-fifth-century Middle East

The origins of the Church of the East can be traced back to early Christian communities in the Middle East. In this early period, cities in frontier regions between the Roman and the Parthian Empires (247BCE-224CE) — for example, Antioch, Edessa (modern Urfa in southeastern Turkey) and Arbela (in northern Iraq) — were Christian strongholds. The Parthian-controlled province of Assyria in particular provided an ideal shelter for Christians who escaped the persecutions of the Roman Empire. There, Christians used Classical Syriac as a major literary language into which to translate the Bible, explore theological concepts and write liturgy and poetry; in the process gradually developing their own religious traditions and rituals.⁵

During the Sasanian Empire (224-651), the Church of the East continued to prosper. In the early fourth century, the bishops of Seleucia-Ctesiphon assumed leadership over the churches in Persia.⁶ In the fifth century, Christians grew into a force strong enough to exert some competitive pressure upon the Persian state religion, Zoroastrianism. Meanwhile, the local Christian church was reinforced demographically and theologically by the arrival of adherents of Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (r. 428-431), who were being persecuted by other Christians in the Roman Empire on account of their adherence to what is called the Nestorian controversy after the 431 Council of Ephesus.

The Nestorian controversy concentrated on the debate about Christology. Nestorius claimed that the Virgin Mary should be called *Christotokos* (mother of Christ) rather than *Theotokos* (mother of God). This doctrine contradicted the understanding of some then prominent churchmen, most notably Cyril of Alexandria (r. 412-444), who were not natives of Antioch,

⁴ For a concise review of these theories, see A.C. Moule (1930:1-26). Lately, a number of scholars have proposed that, in the years between 65 and 68 CE, the group around Thomas carved some stone images (fish, birds, human figures) on the rock faces of Kongwangshan 孔望山 in Lianyungang 連雲港, a northern Chinese port city. For more information, see Pierre Perrier (2012) and the Thomas-in-China webpage maintained by Enjeux de L'Étude du Christianisme des Origines, <http://www.eecho.fr/category/christianisme-apostolique/thomas-en-chine/>. However, mainstream scholars have shown that, as one would expect, these images were made by Buddhists. For a short English introduction to these sculptures, see Sonya Lee (2010:33 ff.).

⁵ For more details, see David Wilmshurst (2011:1-11), Christoph Baumer (2006:99-25), and Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler (2003:7-11).

⁶ David Wilmshurst 2011:12, 32.

the city in which Nestorius received his theological training. Cyril and others argued that the term Christotokos implied that Christ was not truly God but merely human. Driven by zealous piety, personal ambition and other factors, they vehemently accused Nestorius of undermining the unity of the human and divine natures of Christ, thereby of denying the reality of the Incarnation. After a heated and complex debate, they successfully deposed Nestorius, and had his teaching officially condemned as a heresy not once but twice; first in the Council of Ephesus and then in the Council of Chalcedon (451).⁷ Denounced by official anathemas, his followers faced severe persecution in the Roman Empire, and they fled to the Persian Empire in large numbers. There, they were welcomed by church theologians who, like Nestorius, had been trained in Antioch. They intermingled with regional Christians and strengthened the local church.

1.1.2 The expansion of the Church of the East from Central Asia to China's western borders

Examining the ancient Christian presence in Central Asia, it has to be acknowledged that the surviving evidence is not very extensive. Few contemporaneous local records have come to us. For instance: "No Christian Sogdian texts have been discovered in Sogdiana."⁸ As far as I am aware, there are no Chinese historical sources that document Christians in Sogdiana, even though the Tang court had set up post stations along the Oxus River in the mid-seventh century and only retreated from this area in the mid-eighth century in the wake of the historical confusion caused by the conjunction of Muslim expansion into Central Asia and the devastation of the Tang heartland caught up in the throes of the An Lushan Rebellion 安史之亂 (755-763).

Despite scant evidence, the Christian presence and Christian activities in Central Asia are undeniable. It has been attested by relevant passages contained in the Syriac and Arabic texts that have been examined by Alphonse Mingana, and archeological finds like the many Syro-Turkish tombstones that are being digitized by P.G. Borbone.⁹ All these materials suggest that major centers like Merv, Samarkand, Semirychye and Turfan had nourished sizable Christian communities for some time.

⁷ The condemnation of Nestorius cannot be reduced to a merely theological disagreement. Political factions, personal maneuverings, confusion about terminology, powers of discourse and rhetoric and interpretative methods all appear to have played important roles in his downfall. For more details, see Susan Wessel (2004), Sebastian P. Brock (1996), John A. McGuckin (1996:7-21, 1994) and W. Macomber (1958:142-154).

⁸ Nicholas Sims-Williams 1992a:532.

⁹ Alphonse Mingana 1925. For the project directed by P.G. Borbone in Pisa University, see Margherita Farina (2013).

Among these cities, Merv seems to have played a leading role in the evangelization of Central Asia. As the gateway to Central Asia proper, the oasis city of Merv and its adjacent lands probably served as a springboard for the Church of the East from which it could expand to the north and beyond. In the early fifth century, the city was the seat of a bishopric that sent delegates to participate in synods held in Mesopotamia. Bishops Bar Shabba and John, for instance, represented Merv in the synods of 424 and 497.¹⁰ In the sixth century, Merv became a metropolitanate, “ranking seventh in seniority after other cities located mainly in Mesopotamia”.¹¹ During these two centuries, dozens of Christian centers were established along the western bank of the Oxus River, and these centers like Herat and Sīstān regularly continued to send representatives to church meetings for a few more centuries.¹²

In Sogdiana, Christians were residing in its principal city, Samarkand, no later than the seventh century. Early evidence of their presence there are a possible Christian cross on the obverse of coins attributed to a ruler of Osrūšana (sixth or early seventh century) and some ossuaries with Christian symbols excavated in Samarkand and dated not later than the seventh century.¹³ However, the time of the creation of a metropolitan see in Samarkand is unclear. B.E. Colless states that Arabic and Syriac sources yield various dates, ranging from the early fifth century, under the patriarchate of Ahai, to the early eighth century under Patriarch Selibha Zekha.¹⁴ The local Christian community seems to have flourished in the tenth and again in the thirteenth century. Many tombstones from this period have been found by Soviet archeologists, and they are being re-examined by Mark Dickens.¹⁵ In the fifteenth century, Samarkand Christians were annihilated during a persecution.¹⁶

When precisely Christians journeyed farther east and created centers or metropolitanates in China’s westernmost province, Xinjiang 新疆, is very hard to determine. The information is fragmentary. The earliest record of the metropolitan see of Kashgar seems to be that of Patriarch Elijah III (r. 1176-1190) nominating two successive metropolitans: John and Sabrisho.¹⁷ In Khotan, a Christian cemetery has been found as well as the remains of a church building can be dated to the mid-fifth century.¹⁸ Closer to the desert’s eastern fringes, there is an impressive Christian presence in the Turfan Oasis. In Bulayīq, a town situated about 10

¹⁰ Alphonse Mingana 1925:320.

¹¹ Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit 1999:210.

¹² Erica C.D. Hunter 1992:365; Alphonse Mingana 1925:318-320.

¹³ Cited from Nicholas Sims-Williams (1992a:532).

¹⁴ B.E. Colless 1986:51-52.

¹⁵ Mark Dickens 2016:106-129.

¹⁶ B.E. Colless 1986:53-55.

¹⁷ Alphonse Mingana 1925:325.

¹⁸ Cited from Nicholas Sims-Williams (1992a:532).

kilometers north of Turfan in the foothills of the Tianshan 天山, the German teams led by A. von Le Coq found a whole library of Christian fragments at the beginning of the twentieth century. The presence of Sogdian and other religious manuscripts focusing on asceticism and the religious life has led scholars to assume that the site must have been a monastery of the Church of the East. These manuscripts are written in various languages, but the majority are in Sogdian and Syriac. Most can be dated around the ninth and tenth century.¹⁹ The bulk of them are now housed in Germany and have attracted the attention of a long line of scholars from J.P. Asmussen and Nicholas Sims-Williams to Erica C.D. Hunter and Mark Dickens.²⁰

1.1.3 Speculation about a pre-Tang Christian presence

Since there is little doubt that the Church of the East had reached the western edge of China proper by the seventh century, many scholars have speculated that Christian missionaries, using Central Asia as a transit route, could have entered China before 635. For instance, Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit write that “a Christian presence in China in the 6th century cannot be completely ruled out”.²¹

While nobody would deny that the expansion of the Church of the East is impressive, the speculation about a pre-Tang presence has not been substantiated by any archeological finds, by Chinese annals or by church records. Crucially, so far there has been a failure to distinguish between the incidental presence of Christian travelers and traders, as opposed to the presence of a settled Christian community.

We should realize that some Christians traveling into ancient China does not necessarily provide sound evidence that Christianity as a faith was introduced into the Far East. By analogy, today technologies allow people to mobilize in unprecedented numbers. Even the remotest corners of the Earth welcome massive numbers of visitors each year, but most of these visitors do not travel to diffuse their faiths. Almost all travelers are concerned with pragmatic matters — family, business, sightseeing and the more mundane aspects of life. At this moment, for instance, thousands of Westerners who are Christians are touring China; but, undeniably, the majority are not promulgating Christianity. Similarly, among the millions of ancient Christians who trekked along the Silk Road, the majority were merchants who traveled in endless caravans for business rather than for propagating their faith.

¹⁹ Nicholas Sims-Williams 1990:545.

²⁰ J.P. Asmussen 1982. The fragments are so numerous it took 100 years for scholars to publish them. For the latest publications, see Nicholas Sims-Williams (2014), and Erica C.D. Hunter and Mark Dickens (2014).

²¹ Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit 1999:267.

Pertinently, although some of these people were zealous about evangelizing the foreign lands, it is inconceivable that the majority of the Christian merchants would have taken a vow to spread their faith at every opportunity wherever they stopped. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, even if some pre-seventh-century remains (for example, a cross) are excavated in the future, this evidence will still be too flimsy to pronounce that Christianity as a faith (religion) had been introduced into China. After all, there is nothing to stop an individual convert roaming through a new land, but undeniably the ability or the conviction to implant a religion into a new culture is something that goes very well beyond the realm of an individual's capacities. In a nutshell, for the first clear evidence of a Christian presence in China, in spite of the impressive pre-seventh-century expansion of the Church of the East, we must still look to the Tang church.

1.2 The earliest undisputed Christian presence in China: the Tang church

This research agrees with mainstream scholarship that the earliest Christian presence in China can be traced back solely to the Tang church. Apart from the seven Christian manuscripts found in Dunhuang Cave 17 that are the subject of this thesis, the other primary records used by scholars are quite explicit. Roughly speaking, these records can be divided into three groups: Chinese Christian sources and Chinese historical texts supplemented by a few other fragments. As most documents will be discussed more extensively in the following chapters, this section will focus predominantly on the Xi'an Stele and will mention the other sources only briefly.

1.2.1 The Xi'an Stele

The Xi'an Stele, also known as the Nestorian Monument, stands 2 meters tall and is now housed in the Xi'an Stele Museum 西安碑林博物館 — see Figure 1.1.²² Of all the evidence, it is by far the most important primary source, yielding a rich variety of information about the Tang church. Most of the historical data are derived from this Stele and cannot be found anywhere else.

In structural terms, the Stele can be divided into two parts.²³ The first part is a crest that is decorated with a common Chinese religious motif — Figure 1.2. It has been dressed into a half-round circle on which two intricately entwined dragons facing a large circular object

²² The Stele is about 20 centimeters thick. For a detailed measurement, see Henri Havret (1897:140, 161). For how the Stele was moved into the museum in 1907, see Lu Yuan 路遠 (2009).

²³ As shown in Fig. 1.1, the Stele should have one more part, a tortoise foundation called a *guifu* 龜趺 in Chinese. Sadly, the original base has never been found. Figs 1.1 and 1.2 are photographed by David Castor.

(pearl?). They support a flat face that is decorated with a Maltese cross set on a lotus flower below which is carved the title of the Stele, *Daqin Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei* (大秦景教流行中國碑). The second part of the Stele is the inscription that is entitled *Jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei song bing xu* (景教流行中國碑頌並序).



Figure 1.1 The Xi'an Stele



Figure 1.2 The crest of the Xi'an Stele

The inscription is a long text that contains approximately 1,800 Chinese characters supplemented by a few lines of Syriac at the bottom. Seventy monks' names are inscribed in both Chinese and Syriac on both sides of the Stele.²⁴ It was composed by Jingjing, "Adam priest and chorepsicopus and *fapsh'* of Şin(i)stan" (ܐܕܡ ܩܪܝܬܐ ܕܩܠܝܬܐ ܕܫܝܢܝܫܬܐ ܕܩܝܡܐ ܕܩܠܝܬܐ).²⁵ The inscription opens with a theological introduction, recounting the Creation, the fall of man, the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Ascension of Jesus, the Trinity as well as the important rites and practices — baptism, facing east in worship, growing beards, sevenfold daily worship and so on. Then follows a historical account that documents the expansion of

²⁴ Some names on the Stele's left side were ruined by Han Taihua 韓泰華, who added a few columns of Chinese to document that he built a roof to shelter the Stele in 1859. For more details, see Michael Keevak (2008:107). For a full translation of the Syriac names, see Paul Pelliot (1984:55-61).

²⁵ For the English translation of the original Syriac, see Samuel N.C. Lieu (2009:229). The rank, chorepsicopus [chorepiscopus], means country-bishop or a suffragan bishop; *fapsh'* seems to be the Chinese Buddhist (Daoist) term for a priest or a monk: *fashi* 法師; Şin(i)stan is China.

the Tang church under the patronage of various Tang rulers between 635 and 781 — see below. The third part consists of a verse of poetry that recapitulates the theology and showers lavish praise on the Chinese emperors. The final part is a short yet important note that sheds some light on the communication maintained between the Tang church and its mother church in the Middle East. It gives the time of the setting up of the Stele (781) and mentions that “The ruling Patriarch Ningshu learns about the *Jing* community [Christians] in the East” (時法主僧寧恕知東方之景眾也).²⁶

A few more words must be said about the historical account given in the inscription. This account is not a simple historical narration recounting how the Tang church expanded over time. It is also a meticulous list of the imperial patronage bestowed by six male Tang emperors: Taizong, Gaozong, Xuanzong, Suzong, Daizong and Dezong, providing crucial chronological points of reference. Understandably, this account also eulogizes the Tang court and this rules out any chance of neutrality. Upon consideration, it should probably be considered more a claim to a historical pedigree than a purely historical document. As demonstrated by the extensive quotations below, the phrasing is so ornate that when translated into English many sentences do not make any sense at all. It sings the praises of the emperors who supported it to the skies, but carefully avoids criticizing the Empress Wu, during whose reign, as will be discussed in detail, the Tang church suffered severe setbacks. “In the eyes of the author of the [S]tele,” Pénélope Riboud observes, “tolerance towards foreign religions depended almost entirely on the emperor’s will to accept them.”²⁷ Therefore, this short account also offers us a unique glimpse of the church-state relationship.²⁸

The Stele was discovered in Xi’an by chance in the 1620s.²⁹ Over the past four hundred years, it has generated an abundance of literature. A debate about its genuineness, for instance, was ignited soon after the Jesuits in China reported the discovery to Europe in the 1620s. This debate occupied the better part of three centuries, involving almost all the best Western minds — Athanasius Kircher, Leibniz and Voltaire, to name just a few.³⁰ Doubts were stilled

²⁶ Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Col.31. Ningshu is the phonetic transcription of Hananishu, the patriarch of the Church of the East in Seleucia-Ctesiphon who died in 780. Given the distance, it is generally assumed that this news probably had not yet reached Tang China by 781. For more details, see Samuel N.C. Lieu (2009:230-231).

²⁷ Pénélope Riboud 2001:31.

²⁸ For the latest research on the church-state relationship, see Pénélope Riboud (2001:30-33) and Chen Huaiyu 陳懷宇 (2015).

²⁹ For the exact time and place of discovery, see Li Tang (2004:25-29) and Pénélope Riboud (2001:12-15).

³⁰ Jesuits treated the discovery as a providential sign, utilizing the Stele to convince the Chinese that Christianity (Catholicism) was not new and to persuade more Europeans to support their work (Order). However, opponents suspected that the Jesuits had fabricated this Stele for their own interests. For this debate and how the Stele was accepted in Europe, see Michael Keevak’s monograph (2008).

only in the early 1900s when the Stele was meticulously studied by Henri Havret and P.Y. Saeki and more supporting sources were found.³¹

1.2.2 Chinese non-Christian sources

In the course of the twentieth century, scholars also found a few Tang Chinese non-Christian texts, official and lay, that document Tang Christians. All are very short. Most mention the Tang church only in passing — actually as no more than a designation. Yet they provide an important context to our discussion. All will be used in the following sections.

The first group are three edicts. The 638 edict is the one that permitted the propagation of Christianity in the Tang Empire. One version of this edict is also carved on the Xi'an Stele. The 745 edict ordered that the name of the Christian church be changed. The 845 edict curbed the propagation of all so-called non-Chinese religions, including Christianity.

The second source is a catalogue of Chinese Buddhist sutras, *The Datang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan shijiaolu* 大唐貞元續開元釋教錄. It was compiled by the monk Yuanzhao 圓照 in 794. It briefly documents that Jingjing collaborated with Prajna to translate the Buddhist sutras. This cooperation was first studied by J. Takakusu, who relied on an almost identical version found in *The Zhenyuan xinding shijiaolu* 貞元新定釋教錄 that was also composed by Yuanzhao six years later in 800.³² I shall concentrate on the 794 version.

The third source is *The Chongyansi beiming bingxu* 重巖寺碑銘並序, a Chinese text that commemorates the renovation of a Buddhist monastery in E'zhou 鄂州, a city in the mid-Yangtze River region. It was authored by a local governor, Shu Yuanyu 舒元與, in 824.

Besides these documents, there is one private source that is often mentioned by scholars, *The Liangjing xinji* 兩京新記. As it contains a record of the topography of Xi'an and Luoyang, there is a chance that it mentions the Tang church under the designation *Bosisi* 波斯寺 that this study translates as Persian Monastery. It was compiled by Wei Shu 韋述 in the 720s. The original version is long lost but many of its sections seem to have been preserved in other, later sources. The fly in the ointment is that these surviving sections have obviously been

³¹ P.Y. Saeki 1916; Henri Havret 1902, 1897, 1895.

³² J. Takakusu 1896.

redacted, and for this reason *The Liangjing xinji* is not used in this dissertation to construct its arguments.³³

1.2.3 Newly discovered Christian inscriptions

Between the early 1950s and 2016, a few more Christian stone inscriptions have been excavated in China. All are dated to the early ninth century. The most reliable ones are those known as *Mi Jifen muzhi* 米繼芬墓誌 (806), *Hua Xian muzhi* 花獻墓誌 (828) and the Luoyang Pillar (829). The most dubious example is *Li Su muzhi* 李素墓誌 (818). As argued below, it should not be included in the source material.

Furthermore, *Aluohan muzhi* 阿羅憾墓誌 (about 300 characters) has also been associated with the Tang church for some time. This tombstone reveals that Aluohan was a Persian nobleman who had made a successful political career in Tang China. It was reported by Duan Fang 端方 (1861-1911). In 1913, Haneda Toru initially suspected that Aluohan was the transcription of Abraham; in 1916, P.Y. Saeki, who was inspired by Haneda Toru, was the first to identify Aluohan as a Christian.³⁴ Recently, however, Antonino Forte has lucidly exposed the fact that Haneda Toru's suspicion was taken for granted to be factual and fueled an impressive amount of speculation. He concludes that "there is no basis whatsoever allowing to state that Aluohan was a Christian nor that his original name was Abraham."³⁵ As far as the sources are concerned, there is no longer any reason to take this stone as a Christian source.

1.2.4 Other sources

There are yet more texts that seem to document the Tang church. The first are five Syriac and Arabic fragments that might refer to Tang Christians. These are discussed by A. Mingana and Pénélope Riboud.³⁶ The second are a few other Dunhuang manuscripts that also mention Christianity, albeit briefly — like the fragments of *The Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記. They are dealt with in Chapter 6.

³³ This source seems to have been rather popular and was frequently quoted. For instance, it was the main text Song Minqiu 宋敏求 used when he compiled *The Henan zhi* 河南志 and *The Chang'an zhi* 長安志 in 1054 and 1076 respectively. Scholars believe that the original Tang version can be reconstructed on the basis of later quotations. For a restored version, see Xin Deyong 辛德勇 (2006).

³⁴ Cited from Antonino Forte (1996a:375-428).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 409. See also Ma Xiaohu 馬小鶴 (2008:538-578) and Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:227-270).

³⁶ Pénélope Riboud 2001:9; A. Mingana 1925:305-308. These sources suggest that the Church of the East had a metropolitan see in China. However, these small nuggets of information are no more than brief mentions, and their information is too fragmentary to allow a more detailed reconstruction.

1.3 The three periods of the Tang church (635-840s)

In the conventional narrative, the fate of the Tang Church was tragic: all Christians disappeared after 845. To understand how scholars have arrived at this narrative with its gloomy ending, this section introduces the Tang church taking into account ancient sources, the general background of Tang culture and scholarly publications. In order to get a grip on the materials, I have divided the Tang Christian presence into three periods: arrival-diffusion (635-649), expansion-setback-recovery (649-790s) and disappearance (800-840s).³⁷

1.3.1 Arrival-diffusion (635-649)

According to the Xi'an Stele:³⁸

Taizong, the accomplished emperor, was glorious and inspirational. He learnt from the sages how to reign over people. In the country of *Daqin*, the Great Virtue was named Aluoben. By observing the blue clouds and catching the rhythm of winds, he carried true sutras, traveled through perils and reached Chang'an in the ninth year of the Zhenguan reign [635]. At the command of Emperor [Taizong], the minister Duke Fang Xuanling led an escort of guards of honor to the western outskirts [of Xi'an], receiving and then conducting Aluoben to the palace. Aluoben translated books in the library and was questioned about the Way in the imperial apartments. Understanding the profound truth, the Emperor thereafter permitted the propagation. In the seventh month (autumn) of the twelfth year of the Zhenguan reign [638], the edict was issued: "The Way does not have a constant name. The Holy does not have a permanent form. All teachings are established according to the locality, benefiting the living. Aluoben, the Great Virtue from the country of *Daqin*, has brought scriptures to the Upper Capital from afar. Perusing the doctrines, one finds that they are mysterious and non-action; scrutinizing the fundamental principles, one finds that they are established and essential. The wording should be concise; the reasoning should be flexible. As they are beneficial to things and people, they should be promulgated under Heaven. Have the requisite offices construct a *Daqin* Monastery in the Yining quarter of the capital and ordain twenty-one monks." (太宗文皇帝光華啟運明聖臨人大秦國有上德曰阿/羅本占青雲而載真經望風律以馳艱險貞觀九祀至於長安帝使宰臣房公玄齡總仗西郊賓迎入內翻經書殿問道禁闈深知正真特令傳授貞觀十有二/年秋七月詔曰道無常名聖無常體隨方設教密濟群生大秦國大德阿羅本遠將經像來獻上京詳其教旨玄妙無為觀其元宗生成立要詞無繁說理有忘筌/濟物利人宜行天下所司即於京義寧坊造大秦寺一所度僧二十一人)

This quotation outlines the first stage of the Tang church: the arrival and diffusion during the reign of the second Tang emperor. According to this record, the first missionary, Aluoben, arrived in 635 and was given a warm official reception by high-ranking court officials. After he

³⁷ There are other ways to periodize the Tang church. For example, John Foster (1939) visualizes a progression of five stages: arrival (635-649), advance and opposition (650-711), recovery (712-754), great influence (756- the early ninth century) and eclipse (the early ninth century-845). Samuel Hugh Moffett (1998:291-314) proposes four stages: the first Christian mission (635-649), persecution (656-712), recovery (712-781) and disappearance (781-980). As only the pre-781 presence was recorded in some detail thanks to the Xi'an Stele, Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit (1999:267, 282) simply divide the Tang church into two periods — appearance (before 781) and disappearance.

³⁸ Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Cols. 10-13.

had spent a few years translating religious texts into Chinese and discussing these texts with Tang Taizong, Aluoben won the emperor's trust, securing an edict that allowed him to begin the propagation of his religion in 638 by constructing a church building in Xi'an.

Admittedly, this record is over-concise. Some critical details are not clear. For example, who exactly was Aluoben? How did he establish contact with the Tang court? The paucity of the information has already caused some scholars to doubt the accuracy of Jingjing's narration of the early-seventh-century history almost 150 years later in 781 — for example, the grandiose reception might have been an exaggeration.³⁹ Nevertheless, it is true that Jingjing did redact some texts. The most obvious proof of this is the usage of the term *Daqin*, that, as will be shown, was widely used only after 745. Most likely, the first church building was designated a *Bosisi* (Persian Monastery) rather than *Daqinsi* (Daqin Monastery). Nonetheless, both the general conditions and other sources indicate that by and large this brief record seems accurate.

Firstly, conditions in the early seventh century seem to have been very favorable to the implantation of a new religion in Chinese society. The Tang dynasty at the time was a young court led by open-minded, strong rulers. These early Tang rulers were less extravagant and were more empathetic toward people. They often consulted court officials and were willing to follow professional advice. Internally, they reformed the government and encouraged agriculture, literature and trade; externally, they sought to improve relations with neighbors by diplomatic negotiations. Tang Taizong, for instance, is widely regarded as one of the greatest rulers in China's history. His rule became the exemplary model for future emperors. His policies were so effective that the Tang court quickly grew strong enough to bring changes into the Asian political arena. In 630, he brought Turkic powers under his rule and was given the title Heavenly Qaghan, as if he were the suzerain of all the Turkic peoples.⁴⁰

Secondly, several specific points contained in the Xi'an Stele are confirmed by other records. The most informative and important source, the Diffusion Edict, was also recorded in other sources like *The Tanghuiyao* 唐會要, an institutional history of the Tang dynasty compiled in 961. In all versions, the diffusion year (638), the construction site of the first church (the Yining quarter) and the number of the ordained monks (21) are consistent. As far as this edict,

³⁹ For more detail, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2011a:123-127, 2003: 57-61).

⁴⁰ For more details, see Denis Twitchett (2007:222) and Zhu Zhenhong 朱振宏 (2003).

or at least these detailed aspects, is concerned, Jingjing neither forged it nor made any serious redactions. The 638 Diffusion Edict can be safely used as a source.⁴¹

1.3.2 Expansion-setback-recovery (649-790s)

The fortunes of the Tang church in the period of expansion-setback-recovery are also recorded almost exclusively on the Xi'an Stele. Nevertheless, there are a few additional sources that yield interesting clues to endorse these findings. All these sources will be incorporated together in chronological order in this section.

After Taizong died in 649, his son Gaozong inherited many of his policies, one of which was that of religious tolerance. The Xi'an Stele confirms that Gaozong continued to patronize Christians, and he even bestowed a high title on Aluoben:⁴²

Gaozong, the great emperor, duly succeeded to the ancestors and embellished true principles. Not only did he have *Jingsi* [Christian monasteries] erected in each prefecture, but he also promoted Aluoben to be the State Great Protector. The law spread into ten provinces. The country enjoyed great prosperity and stability. Monasteries stood in one hundred cities. All families enjoyed the *jing* [Christian] blessings. (高宗大帝克恭繼祖潤色真宗而於諸州各置景寺仍崇阿羅本為鎮國大法主法流十/道國富元休寺滿百城家殷景福)

Unquestionably the expansion documented is impressive. By the end of the seventh century, Christianity would be seen to have been spreading into many provinces of the Tang Empire. As some phrases like the “ten provinces” exactly match the administrative system of Tang China (that divided the Empire into ten provinces), it is an intriguing challenge to try to see how far Christianity actually penetrated into Tang China and if it exerted any influence on Chinese culture. The greatest problem is that these numbers and indications, like “each prefecture” and “one hundred cities”, cannot be taken at face value.⁴³ So far, no archeological evidence for the Tang church has been found in any Chinese cities other than Xi'an and Luoyang. These grandiose indications might, therefore, be little more than polite flattery of both the reigning dynasty and the Tang church. The text on the Stele is, of course, a form of court panegyric, and the choice of words might have done little more than add some extra color to a rather modest achievement.

⁴¹ Except for the usage of the terms *Daqin* and *Bosi*, other variations remain on the morphological level. The close similarity between the different versions has prompted Antonino Forte (1996b:349-373) to restore the full, original edict.

⁴² Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Cols. 15-16.

⁴³ For more discussions, including other numbers recorded on the Xi'an Stele, see Pénélope Riboud (2001:25-30), F.S. Drake (1936-1937), and Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:27-64).

Nonetheless, the fate of Christians changed dramatically after Tang Gaozong died in 683. Setbacks quickly presented themselves:⁴⁴

In the Shengli reign [698-700], the Buddhists seized the advantage and raised their voices [against Christians] in the Eastern Capital [Luoyang]. At the end of the Xiantian reign [713], the *xiashi* [Daoists] derided and slandered [Christians] in the Western Capital [Xi'an]. (聖曆年釋子用壯騰口於東周先天末下士大笑訕謗於西鎬)

Although neither the Stele nor other Chinese sources give any supplementary information and are silent about whether similar incidents occurred outside Luoyang and Xi'an, the inference that can be drawn from the sources discussed below is that the setback was in deadly earnest. The churches in the two capitals were damaged, if not ruined. They do not seem to have been restored until the 720s when efforts to make a recovery finally succeeded. Since the general atmosphere and religious policies changed abruptly when the Empress Wu seized the imperial power from the Li family, it seems that the Tang church did suffer severe duress in the period from the 690s to the 710s, and that the achievements of the earlier fifty years all threatened to come to naught.

The Empress Wu was an ambitious and intelligent woman, gifted with excellent judgment in politics and men. She was born into a rich family that had supported the first Tang emperor in his fight for the throne. At the age of fourteen, she was taken to the palace to be a low-ranking concubine of Taizong. When Taizong died, she married his son Gaozong, and finally became the empress in 655 after a series of bloody power struggles. After her second husband died, she gained full control over the court and her ambition seemed to know no bounds. She successively raised the rank of and then demoted her other two sons, Tang Zhongzong and Tang Ruizong. Finally, she wearied of this puppet show, took the title of Emperor 皇帝 herself and ascended the throne, not only removing the capital from Xi'an to Luoyang but also changing the title of the dynasty from Tang to Zhou in 690.⁴⁵

Understandably, such a usurpation by a female could not easily be tolerated in a patriarchal society. The Li family and orthodox royalists rebelled and instigated a number of *coups d'état*. Undeterred to secure her grip on power, the Empress Wu devised a series of strategies. On the one hand, she responded with ruthlessness and cruelty. Before she was deposed by a *coup d'état* led by her daughter Princess Taiping and her grandson, the future Emperor

⁴⁴ Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Col.16.

⁴⁵ For more introduction to the rise in power of Empress Wu and her reign, see N. Harry Rothschild (2015, 2008).

Xuanzong, in 705, she like all other male emperors ruled with an iron fist.⁴⁶ Meanwhile, she shrewdly realized that religion could benefit her ascendancy. With this in mind, she altered state religious policies and used Buddhism to legitimize her rule. In Tang China, Daoism had enjoyed a special status. Tang emperors claimed to be descendants of Li Er 李耳, the legendary founder and presiding deity of Daoism, who happened to have shared the same family name as that of the Tang royal family. For this reason, they had elevated Daoism to the status of a state cult.⁴⁷ In 666 Gaozong, for example, visited the temple of Li Er and created him “grandiose and primordial emperor” (太上玄元皇帝).⁴⁸ To ensure that her machinations were successful, Empress Wu deliberately reversed this policy by promoting Buddhism. Six months after her ascension, she “ordered: Buddhist doctrine ranks higher than the Daoist law, and the Buddhist monks and nuns take precedence over the Taoist priests and convents” (令釋教在道法之上，僧尼處道士女冠之前).⁴⁹ Taking matters even further, she also utilized the Buddhist eschatological prophecy of Maitreya, a future Buddha of this world. It was foretold that this bodhisattva would be reincarnated as a female deity who would become the monarch of the entire world. She ordered that this prophecy be recorded in *The Dayunjing* 大雲經 and dispatched it throughout the empire.⁵⁰

It goes without saying that the change in state policy upset the religious status quo. The ascendancy of Buddhism on this surge of imperial favor triggered a large-scale reallocation of societal resources. The changed religious dynamic presented a competitive challenge not to mention a certain threat to other religions including Daoism. Minor beliefs like Christianity probably felt even more pressured than Daoism, especially given that it lost its imperial patronage in a period of political turmoil. The actual pressure, one should imagine, must have been much greater than the verbal threats recorded in the Xi'an Stele.

Of course, Christians sought measures to face these challenges and looked for ways to consolidate and revive the Tang church. One of the steps that they took was to seek outside assistance. The Xi'an Stele tells us that monks and noblemen arrived in China from the West and offered great help.⁵¹

Luohan, the head monk, and Jilie, the Great Virtue, together with the noblemen from the West and other eminent monks who had forsaken all earthly interests; all cooperated in

⁴⁶ For more details, see Charles Benn (2002:5).

⁴⁷ For a concise introduction of the Tang Daoism, see T.H. Barrett (1996).

⁴⁸ Liu Xu 劉煦 945/1975:90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁰ Several copies of this text have been found in Dunhuang. For more details, see Antonino Forte (2005, 1988).

⁵¹ Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Cols.16-17.

restoring the fundamental principles and rebinding the broken ties. (有若僧首羅含大德及烈並金方貴緒物外高僧共振玄網俱維/絕紐)

Not much is known about this delegation. Some of its members must have been high-ranking and resourceful officials or diplomats. Their primary aim seems to have been to contact the Tang court and attempt to regain imperial patronage. And their strategy worked: the following passage on the Stele reveals that imperial patronage was resumed. Churches in the Tang capitals were repaired. Emperor Xuanzong commanded five of his brothers or the five kings in the following quotation to visit the church and bestowed his favor on the renovated church by sending portraits of deceased Tang emperors, all males of course. By the 740s, when the second delegation led by Jihe arrived in China from the West and was even granted the privilege of holding a service in the Chinese imperial palace, the Tang church would seem to have recovered from its previous setback:⁵²

Xuanzong, the Perfection of the Way Emperor, ordered the Ningguo King and four other kings to visit the monastery and set up the altars. The temporarily distorted beam of the Law was rectified; the momentarily turned stone of the Way was restored. At the beginning of the Tianbao reign [742-756], he commanded the General Gao Lishi to dispatch the portraits of the five sages [the previous five male emperors] to be placed in the monastery and bestowed one hundred rolls of silk [on it]. In the third year [744], Jihe from the country of *Daqin* examined the stars, chose an auspicious day and came to the court. Seventeen monks including Luohan and Pulun, were summoned as was Jihe, the Great Virtue, to perform religious services in the Xingqing Palace. The emperor personally wrote the calligraphy for the name of the monastery. The dragon [emperor's] writing was hung above the door. The writing was richly decorated, sparkling more brightly than the gleaming clouds; the writing of the wise pervaded space, rising and radiating as if vying with the sun. (玄宗至道皇帝令寧國等五王親臨福宇建立壇場法棟暫橈而更崇道石時傾而復正天寶初令大將軍高力士送五聖寫真寺內安置賜絹百匹 [.....] 三載大秦國有僧佉和瞻星向化望日朝尊詔僧羅含僧普論等一七人與大德佉和於興慶宮修功德於/是天題寺榜額戴龍書寶裝璣翠灼爍丹霞睿扎宏空騰凌激日)

The recovery seems to have culminated in a special edict issued by the Tang court in 745, ordering the designation of Christian church buildings to be changed from *Bosisi* to *Daqinsi*. This crucial edict is recorded in several Chinese sources that have been examined by Antonino Forte; the following version is from *The Tanghuiyao*:⁵³

The sutras and teaching of Persia that originated in *Daqin* had been propagated and practiced in China for a long time. Hence these had given their name to the first monasteries. If it is to be revealed to more people, however, it must follow its origins. Therefore, [the designation] *Bosisi* [Persian Monastery] in the two capitals will be changed to *Daqinsi* [*Daqin* Monastery]. The prefectures and counties that have [these monasteries] shall conform to this change. (波

⁵² *Ibid.*, Cols.17-18.

⁵³ Wang Pu 王溥 961/1955:864. There are a few other versions that are slightly different. They have been examined by Antonino Forte (1996b).

斯經教。出自大秦。傳習而來。久行中國。爰初建寺。因以為名。將欲示人。必修其本。其兩京波斯寺。宜改為大秦寺。天下諸府郡置[寺]者，亦准此。)

As it is the only eighth-century Chinese court document about Christianity that has come down to us, this edict has received considerable scholarly attention, much of it devoted to two interrelated questions: Why was it promulgated and why was the term *Daqin* advocated? For example, Antonino Forte states that “[it] may have been adopted just because by that time official Persian backing of the religion [Christianity] had already ceased. That was quite normal given the collapse of the country and the loss of any hope that the Sassanian dynasty would be restored.”⁵⁴ T.H. Barrett notes that the Byzantines were “seasoned international diplomats” and “were practising a culturally sensitive diplomacy in Asia” that suggests that they could have been involved. He argues:⁵⁵

If they felt any stake in the use of the name *Da Qin*, then it is possible that its use by Nestorians formed part of a deal for information in exchange for protection that could easily have been brokered in advance of the Christians' securing the edict of 745 by the Byzantine mission to China of 742, which certainly included an important cleric, according to the Chinese record.

It is certainly possible that politics played a role in the promotion of the name *Daqin* and the abandonment of the name *Bosi*, because by that time the Persian Empire had ceased to exist.⁵⁶ However, in view of the evidence on the Xi'an Stele, it is more likely that the Church of the East rather than Byzantium was involved in this development. As attested by the above records, at least two delegations arrived at Xi'an during this period: one sometime in the 710s and the other in 744. Although there is no record that the first team knew about and communicated with the second team, it would not be a complete leap in the dark to assume that some members of the first team went back to and briefed the West on the difficult situation in which the Tang Church found itself; while some would have been ordered to remain in China to liaise between the East and the West. Luohan, for instance, seems to have been responsible for liaising. With the assistance of Luohan who had remained in China for three decades, Jihe could have effortlessly updated the Chinese court on the latest

⁵⁴ Antonino Forte 1996b:364.

⁵⁵ T.H. Barrett 2002:560.

⁵⁶ For more details, see David Wilmshurst (2011:121-124) and Pénélope Riboud (2001:18, 20).

developments in the West. Working together, these two Christians could have successfully persuaded the Tang court to abandon the term *Bosi* and use the term *Daqin* instead in 745.⁵⁷

This recovery of the Tang church seems to have led to a period of expansion in the second half of the century. Of this the Xi'an Stele says: Tang Suzong permitted "*Jingsi* [Christian monasteries] to be re-erected in Lingwu and the other four counties" (於靈武等五郡重立景寺); Tang Daizong bestowed incense and food on the Tang church.⁵⁸ Moreover, some Christians became quite famous. Yisi 伊斯, for instance, came from Central Asia and served in the imperial army led by Guo Ziyi 郭子儀, who played a critical role in crushing the An Lushan Rebellion. Probably in appreciation of his loyalty and medical skills, Yisi was summoned by Tang Suzong. Later, he was also rewarded with high-ranking titles and money that enabled him to renovate old churches, take care of the poor, bury the dead and finance the erection of the Stele in 781.⁵⁹ Yisi's son, Jingjing, seems to have been familiar with religious circles. He cooperated with the Buddhist missionary Prajna in the translation of the Buddhist sutras around 786, but the quality of their translations was unsatisfactory and their efforts were rejected by the Tang court. This cooperation is documented in *The Datang Zhenyuan xu Kaiyuan shijiaolu* composed by Yuanzhao in 794:⁶⁰

After petitioning to translate the sutras, [Prajna] began working with Jingjing, the Persian monk in the *Daqin* Monastery, rendering the Satparamita-sutra from a foreign language into seven rolls. At that time, however, Prajna was not familiar with this language, nor did he understand Chinese; Jingjing could not read Sanskrit, nor understand the Buddhist teachings. They claimed that the text had been translated, but they had not extracted even half the meaning. They [...] submitted the translation in the hope of propagating the text. The Emperor [Tang Dezong] was intelligent, wise and accomplished. He revered the Buddhist canons and found out that the translation made no sense and the wording was confusing. Moreover, Buddha's monastery and the *Daqin* Monastery are located in different places. Their practices are diametrically opposed to each other. Jingjing was bound to preach the teaching of the Messiah, and the Buddhist monks had to promulgate the sutras of the Buddha. [The Emperor ...] commanded [others] to rework the text and submit a retranslation. ([般若]請譯佛經。乃與大秦寺波斯僧景淨。依胡本六波羅蜜譯成七卷。時為般若不開胡語。復未解唐言。景淨不識梵文。復未明釋教。雖稱傳譯未獲半珠。[.....] 錄表聞奏。意望流行。聖上睿哲文明允恭釋典。察其所譯理昧詞疎[疏]。且夫釋氏伽藍大秦僧寺居止既別。行法全乖。景淨應傳彌尸訶教。沙門釋子弘闡佛經。[.....] 重更翻譯訖聞奏。)

⁵⁷ This still does not eradicate the problem of the place to which the term *Daqin* actually refers. Although *Daqin* is often associated with Rome, many Chinese texts use this term inconsistently and vaguely to refer to some country to the west of China. In some Daoist sources, as pointed out by T.H. Barrett (2002:558-559), *Daqin* is not even a real country; it is "a specifically Daoist utopia" in the West, for which the "obvious candidate is Byzantium". For a broader discussion of the term *Daqin*, see Samuel N.C. Lieu (2013:123-132).

⁵⁸ Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Col.20.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Cols.22-25. The then ruling emperor was Tang Dezong. For the discussions of Yisi, see Max Deeg (2013) and Nie Zhijun 聶志軍 (2010:215-220, 2008).

⁶⁰ Prajna arrived China in 782. The translation event took place after Prajna had found his relatives and settled down in 786 (貞元二祀). The text here is cited from http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T55/2156_001.htm.

1.3.3 The so-called disappearance (800-840s)

As mentioned several times above, the conventional narrative of the first presence of Christianity in China is that the Tang church disappeared in the ninth century. The 845 Intolerance Edict, Pénélope Riboud points out, “is commonly taken as marking the end of the first period of Christianity in China proper.”⁶¹ As attested by A.C. Moule’s verdict quoted at the beginning of the chapter, it is maintained that not a single Christian could be found in the heartland of China from the ninth century and thereafter.

It is not surprising that this has led to a preoccupation with the so-called “failure” of the Tang church.⁶² Pondering the reasons for its eclipse, some scholars assert that an overdependence on too many Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian expressions watered down the theology and this heavy borrowing in its turn weakened the Christians’ identity. Others accuse the Tang church of relying too much on imperial patronage. On the other hand, many argue that, besides any exacerbation that might have been caused by religious and theological issues, the disappearance was an extremely complex matter and involved larger historical and societal developments.⁶³

Although the findings of this dissertation challenge this narrative of disappearance, it is essential to note that two principal reasons have inspired this theory. The first is related to sources. Before the 1980s, not a single ninth-century Chinese Christian source was known. At the same time, all the then known sources (including the 845 Intolerance Edict) do suggest a tragic fate. Two Arabic sources, for instance, indicate that the Tang Christians died out. A travel account authored by Abu Zayd in the tenth century notes that many Tang Christians did not survive the civil strife that followed the collapse of the court. Abu Zayd reports that “120,000” Muslims, Jews, Mazdeans and Christians were slaughtered in 879 when rebels led by Huang Chao 黃巢 sacked Guangzhou, a port city in South China.⁶⁴ The other account, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, a tenth-century survey of Muslim culture, also suggests that Christians

⁶¹ Pénélope Riboud 2001:8. This edict is fairly long, and some extra clues are supplemented by Chinese annals and by some passages written by the incumbent minister Li Deyu 李德裕. All these records have been reprinted by P.Y. Saeki (1916:281-287). The parts concerned with Christianity were translated into English by John Foster (1939:158-162).

⁶² Pénélope Riboud 2001:35. For more details, see also Samuel Hugh Moffett (1998:303) and Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:85-119).

⁶³ For instance, P.Y. Saeki (1955:(6)-(7)) offers a comprehensive cluster of nine interrelated reasons, of which the first eight are directly related to characteristics of the Tang church that supposedly was too heavily dependent on outside factors.

⁶⁴ Cited from Pénélope Riboud (2001:28). This travelogue is *Ancient Accounts of India and China*.

had all but disappeared. The author, Ibn al-Nadim, was told by a Christian monk from the southern Arabian city Najran who just returned from China that “Christians who used to be in the land of China had disappeared and perished for various reasons, so that only one man remained in the entire country”.⁶⁵ Moreover, the short Chinese essay, *The Chongyansi beiming bingxu*, composed in 824 to commemorate the renovation of the Buddhist Chongyansi Monastery, also indicates that the Christian community had been rather small and its presence was not at all impressive:⁶⁶

The current court follows but surpasses medieval times. It also tolerates the advent of various foreign teachings that include Manichaeism, Daqin [Christianity] and Zoroastrianism. All the three barbarian monasteries under Heaven [Tang China], when taken together, are not enough to equal the number of our Buddhist monasteries in one small city. (國朝沿近古而有加焉。亦容雜夷而來者。有摩尼焉。大秦焉。祆神焉。合天下三夷寺。不足當吾釋寺一小邑之數也。)

The second reason has to do with political instability. By the second half of the ninth century, the Tang government was being openly challenged by powerful local warlords, and the Tang court seemed to be nearing its end. Consequently historians label this period the late Tang. In 907, the last emperor was poisoned at the age of fifteen, and China’s central plains descended into chaos. During the ensuing fifty years or so, five dynasties were established in the North and ten states in the South only to fall again, succeeding one another in quick succession, and it is from them that the usual name of this period, the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms, is derived. Stability was only gradually restored after 960 when Zhao Kuangyin 趙匡胤 founded the Song dynasty that spent roughly the next three decades unifying China’s heartland. This instability, many scholars believe, could have inflicted further, perhaps fatal, damage upon the already weakened Tang church.

These arguments, although widely shared, are not convincing. The ancient sources are anything but clear. All, like the comment about the last Christian, seem to be exaggerated. Moreover, since a few Christian stones have recently been excavated in Xi’an and Luoyang, the dismal fate of the people known as the Tang Christians requires some reconsideration. These stones demonstrate that a number of rich Christian families resided in the two capitals of the Tang Empire and that there was at least one church building in each capital in the first half of the ninth century. Given that the 845 edict did not target these Christian families, Christian ecclesiastics could have left their churches or monasteries and returned to the

⁶⁵ Ibn al-Nadim 1970:837.

⁶⁶ Dong Gao 董誥 1819/1983:7498.

bosom of their lay families from where they could have continued to preach their faith. In other words, Christians could have still been living in the Tang capitals or their vicinities after 845. As the Conclusion to this dissertation will revisit this argument, this section will just cast a swift eye over what these stones add to the sum of our knowledge of Christianity in Tang China.

The early-ninth-century Christian presence in Xi'an is confirmed by the stone *Mi Jifen muzhi*, on which fewer than 500 characters, some of them illegible, have been carved. The inscription briefly records the life of Mi Jifen who was buried in 806. It was found in 1955 but failed to attract much attention until Ge Chengyong re-examined it in 2001 and Matteo Nicolini-Zani translated Ge Chengyong's article into English in 2004.⁶⁷ As the inscription records that Mi Jifen had two sons and "the younger is the monk Siyuan who resides in the *Daginsi*" (幼曰僧思圓住大秦寺), the Christian attribution of this stone is irrefutable.⁶⁸

The presence of Christians in Luoyang is attested by two stones. The first is that known as *Hua Xian muzhi*. This tombstone was found in 2010; the preliminary examination was conducted by Mao Yangguang and Wu Changxing.⁶⁹ The inscription contains almost 600 characters, giving a brief overview of the life of Hua Xian. According to the inscription, Hua Xian remained aloof from worldly concerns, and did not pursue higher governmental posts. Instead he chose to be with his family. He died of an illness at his home in Luoyang and was buried in 828. The inscription on the stone states that Hua Xian was a pious Christian who "often cleansed his heart to serve the *Jingzun* [the Messiah] and strictly observed the teaching" (常洗心事景尊，竭奉教理。).⁷⁰ The nomenclature *Jingzun* was a key term favored by Tang Christians to refer to the Messiah. The 781 Xi'an Stele, for example, uses this phrase: "Therefore, my one-in-three divided, and the *Jingzun* Messiah concealed His true majesty and was born like a man" (於是我三一分身景尊彌施訶戢隱真威同人出代).⁷¹ Pertinently, the phrase *Jingsi* 景寺 that occurs in the final verse of the inscription was also used several times in the paragraphs from the Xi'an Stele quoted above. Every time it occurs it refers to a church building or monastery.⁷²

⁶⁷ Ge Chengyong 2004; Ge Chengyong 葛承雍 2001.

⁶⁸ Ge Chengyong 葛承雍 2001:182.

⁶⁹ Wu Changxing 吳昶興 2015a:247-266, 2015b:197-198; Mao Yangguang 毛陽光 2014. The tombstone of Hua Xian's wife was also discovered at the same time. Sadly, neither inscription documents any religious faith. For the rubbings, see Mao Yangguang 毛陽光 and Yu Fuwei 余扶危 (2013:534-535, 546-547).

⁷⁰ Cited from Mao Yangguang 毛陽光 (2014:85).

⁷¹ Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Col.6.

⁷² For a good list of the use of the character *jing* 景 on the Xi'an Stele, see Xu Longfei (2004:115).

The second stone is the Luoyang Pillar — see Figure 1.3.⁷³ It was unearthed in Luoyang in 2006 and has caused quite a stir around the world. So far, a number of English and Chinese articles have been published about it; some accompanied by fine plates have been collected into a volume by Ge Chengyong.⁷⁴ The pillar is made of limestone and is carved into an irregular octagonal prism. The surviving part is the top half, measuring 40 centimeters in diameter and about 70 centimeters in height.⁷⁵ As indicated by the Buddhist term *jingchuang* (經幢), the stone was not a gravestone buried underground but a pillar erected above the ground, probably directly in front of the tomb.



Figure 1.3 The Luoyang Pillar

Structurally, the pillar can be divided into four parts. The first part, as indicated in Figure 1.3, consists of its top faces that are elaborately decorated with various images including flying human figures and crosses — for the cross rubbings, see also Figures 6.10 b-c. The second part is its main body. Faces 1-4 are inscribed with a short religious text (431 characters), *The Sutra of Origin of Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教宣元至本經. Attached to this religious text is the third part, *The Pillar Epithet of the Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教宣元至本經幢記, that is carved on Faces 5-6. It consists of 364 characters,

⁷³ The picture shows Faces 5, 6 and 7 (anti-clockwise). It has been downloaded from the website of the *Sichou zhilu* 絲綢之路, <http://www.siluyou.org/index/citywwinfo/id/237.html>.

⁷⁴ Ge Chengyong 葛承雍 2009. For the English introductions, see Ge Chengyong (2013), Matteo Nicolini-Zani (2013b, 2009), Zhang Naizhu (2013), and Li Tang (2009).

⁷⁵ The height of each face varies from 60 centimeters to 85 centimeters. For detailed measurements, see Luo Zhao 羅炤 (2007:100, note 1).

documenting the erection of this pillar. The fourth part is the year of the burial 829 that is inscribed at the top of Face 8.⁷⁶

Although the loss of the pillar's lower part precludes our knowledge of some details, its Christian attribution is not contested. Firstly, the crosses, as argued in Chapter 6, are reproduced and decorated in the style preferred by the Church of the East. Secondly, the religious text can be matched to the Dunhuang manuscript, *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*. In fact, the two sources seem to be two versions of the same text. Only a few characters are different, probably because the original text was copied many times and fell victim to inevitable scribal errors. As the differences are limited to the morphological level, many scholars have been tempted to reconstruct an original Tang text.⁷⁷ Finally, four people from the local Daqin Monastery are listed although it is very hard to decipher these names. They are the monk Qingsu (景僧清素), who seems to have been the brother of the deceased, "Xuanying, Harmony of the Doctrine, head of the monastery, whose secular family name was Mi" (寺主法和玄應俗姓米), "Xuanqing, Great Virtue of the Respect-Inspiring Department, whose secular family name was Mi" (威儀大德玄慶俗姓米) and "Zhitong, Great Virtue of the Nine Grades, whose secular family was Kang" (九階大德志通俗姓康).⁷⁸

Besides these examples, there is another questionable tombstone, that of *Li Su muzhi*. The inscription infers that Li Su was a blood nephew of a Persian king. His family had moved to China in the mid-eighth century when his grandfather was sent to the Tang court as a 'hostage' and had had the family name Li bestowed on him. Li Su himself was an excellent astronomer and served in the Tang astronomical bureau for half a century. He died in 818 and was buried alongside his wife, whose tombstone was also unearthed in Xi'an in 1980.

For some time, *Li Su muzhi* did not attract much attention. Recently, however, Rong Xinjiang, with whom Pénélope Riboud concurs, has argued that Li Su was a Christian and that the Li family constituted a big Christian house.⁷⁹ He adduces four pieces of evidence to support his argument. 1. All Li Su's six sons' names contain the character *jing* 景, that, as indicated above, was used as a key term by Tang Christians. 2. *The Simenjing* 四門經, a text on astronomy translated into Chinese by Li Su, is also listed in the Christian manuscript P.3847. 3. At the

⁷⁶ The Pillar bears another important date, 815 (元和九年). This date might have been the time the anonymous deceased died. See also Matteo Nicolini-Zani (2013b, 2009) and Nie Zhijun 聶志軍 (2014; 2010:054-063).

⁷⁷ For more details and the reconstructed version, see Wu Changxing 吳昶興 (2015c:137-171), Nie Zhijun 聶志軍 (2010: 020, 360-361); Lin Wushu 林悟殊 and Yin Xiaoping 殷小平 (2008:329-335).

⁷⁸ All these names are listed in the lower part of Face 8. They have been studied by Matteo Nicolini-Zani (2013b:145-149; 2009:122-124).

⁷⁹ Pénélope Riboud 2015:46; Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 2001:254-257.

4. Li Su's courtesy name, Wenzhen 文貞, also appears on the Xi'an Stele, “ܠܟܐ ܡܢܚܢ ܡܢܚܢ ܡܢܚܢ” (Luka Monk Wenzhen). Therefore, Li Su could have been this Christian monk named Luka in Syriac.

1.4 Conclusion

Christians could have entered China before 635 as the Church of the East gradually expanded toward China's western borders. However, stable Christian communities did not emerge from such occasional visits before the seventh century. It is therefore inconceivable that an individual Christian would have received a theological training adequate to translate or

⁸¹ Wu Qiyu 吳其昱 (2001:41-42) argues that *Yusi simengjing* 聿斯四門經 is an Indian source translated into Chinese. The Christian source *The Simenjing* could have been translated from the *Tetrabiblos*, a Greek text on the philosophy and practice of astrology written by the Alexandrian scholar Claudius Ptolemy in the second century.

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compose these religious texts, or indeed that a small group of believers would have felt the need to produce these Chinese manuscripts.

Although the Tang church is not documented in detail, its presence is obvious. The evidence is diverse and has been accumulating over the past four hundred years. There is no doubt that Christianity gained an institutional presence in China under the Tang Dynasty. The Christians arrived in 635 and began to diffuse their faith in 638. Despite the setbacks in Empress Wu's reign, by and large the Tang church enjoyed imperial patronage, appearing to make considerable advances in Tang China. Sadly, according to the traditional understanding, the 845 Intolerance Edit inflicted unprecedented damage on the Tang church. Consequently, Christianity disappeared in China that had been thrown into turmoil by the chaos that ensued after the collapse of the late-ninth-century Tang court. By the time the Song dynasty had gradually stabilized the country in 960, it is said that not a single Christian remained in China. Therefore many scholars assume that not a single Christian text was composed between the second half of the ninth century and the early eleventh century.

However, newly excavated stones indicate quite clearly that there were Christian families living in China around the area of the capital in the ninth century. It therefore behooves us to take a closer look at what has been called the disappearance of the Tang church and hence the traditional chronology of the seven Dunhuang Christian manuscripts and these topics will be examined in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 Introducing *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

This chapter is an introduction to the most conspicuous Christian religious sources, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. It describes the manuscripts and traces the history of their initial contextualization. It also contains a summary of their content. After these essentials have been dealt with, the chapter weighs up the theory assuming that the two sources are modern forgeries and then turns to the conventional chronology that places their creation in the 640s. In a nutshell, the goal of this chapter is twofold: to demonstrate that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are genuine Christian texts and that their accepted dating is untenable.

2.1 Description and the earliest publications

The Messiah Sutra and *On One God* are both written on long rolls consisting of sheets of paper glued together. The former measures 26.3 centimeters (width) by 276.8 centimeters (length). According to Takakusu Junjiro 高楠順次郎, the seven badly damaged end columns had been cut off by the Chinese seller and replaced by the empty heading we see today — see Figure 2.1.¹ In contrast, *On One God* is more complete and much longer. It measures 25.4 centimeters by 640.0 centimeters. Although the text opens with a sentence rather than a title, the roll seems to have come down to us in its entirety — see Figure 2.2.



Figure 2.1 End part of *The Messiah Sutra*



Figure 2.2 The roll of *On One God* and the first frame

As shown in their color photos, the two manuscripts are in good condition. The paper is thick and the ink has not faded. The Chinese characters arranged in small columns divided by fine

¹ Takakusu Junjiro told this story to Haneda Toru in 1925. However, Haneda Toru 羽田亨 (1926:118) suspected that these mutilated columns could have been much longer and had been deliberately removed to make the overall sale more profitable. For the detailed measurements of these two manuscripts and their color photos, see Takeda Science Foundation 武田科学振興財団 (2012:83-96).

black lines are exquisitely executed. Despite some water stains, none of the glued sheets has deteriorated, crumbled or is infested with wormholes, probably because, besides the local semi-arid climate and the sealing off of Cave 17, the paper was treated with a *huangbo* 黄檗 solution that not only acted as an insecticide but also dyed both manuscripts bright yellow. Judging by these codicological features (appearance, layout, paper treatment and the like), the making of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* conformed to ancient Chinese manuscript-making techniques.² They bear a close resemblance to many other manuscripts found in Dunhuang Cave 17 — see Figures 6.3-6.7.

Both manuscripts were first described and identified as Christian sources by Haneda Toru in the early twentieth century. Haneda Toru claims that *On One God* was purchased from a Chinese book-seller by a Japanese lecturer, Tomeoka Kenzo 富岡謙藏. The latter kept it for a while and then showed it to Haneda Toru, who made the two earliest but very brief studies — one in 1918 and the other in 1923.³ *The Messiah Sutra*, as said, was obtained from an unknown person in China by Takakusu Junjiro. In 1925, he transferred it to Haneda Toru, who disclosed the source a year later.⁴ In 1931, Haneda Toru photographed the complete manuscripts and published them together in one booklet with short introductions that summarize his own previous publications.⁵ After their disclosure to Japanese scholarship, the two sources were rapidly introduced to the West by P.Y. Saeki, who prepared the first full translations in the early 1930s and republished them together with annotations and the Chinese texts in 1937.⁶

Three more issues need to be discussed in this preparatory section. Importantly, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* have been studied and documented only perfunctorily. With the exception of what has just been noted, very little is known about their history before or since they were sold to Japanese collectors. Another, perhaps the greatest, issue is the inaccessibility of the original manuscripts referred to in the Introduction to this dissertation. After these two sources together with *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* were moved to Japan, these four documents have been all kept locked away in secret. Besides the Japanese collectors and Haneda Toru, very few scholars have had the opportunity to study the original scrolls. As far as can be discovered, the only non-

² For more details and the general codicological features of the Dunhuang manuscripts, see Rong Xinjiang (2013:483-492) and Stephen F. Teiser (2012).

³ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1923:157-158, 1918:141-144.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1926:117-118.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1931.

⁶ P.Y. Saeki 1951:125-247 (English translation), 13-70 (Chinese texts), 1934c, 1933, 1932.

Japanese scholar who has had access to the originals was and remains A.C. Moule, and he examined *The Messiah Sutra* only in the 1920s. The combined drawbacks of non-accessibility and poor documentation have been a major impediment to research, because they have made the sources a mystery, thereby adding fuel to the theory that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are modern forgeries.⁷ Fortunately, the Takeda Science Foundation generously exhibited these manuscripts in 2010. It also re-photographed and catalogued them under Haneda Toru's name — the catalogue numbers of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are 羽 459 and 羽 460 respectively. Hopefully, this exhibition and these new color photos will remove some lingering doubts.

The third outstanding issue is the relationship between the two sources. As observed by many scholars, including Haneda Toru himself, the two sources do display some textual similarities.⁸ The closeness of their wording and style is marked and their contents are equally difficult. Many sentences have been broken off and do not lend themselves to straightforward readings. Judging by the calligraphy, they were written within a reasonably short time of one another by one hand.⁹ Despite these correspondences, it is still an uphill battle to explore the interconnection between the two sources. Questions of chronological precedence (which text was made earlier than the other) and hierarchy (was the later text based on the earlier one) are topics that involve many other issues among them manuscript production (purpose, authorship and the like), the study of all other Christian sources as well as a general understanding of the Christian presence in ancient China; all topics that await more research.

2.2 A synopsis of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

As suggested above, both texts are difficult. This difficulty has even led some to suggest that the manuscripts cannot be authentic, because they would have been beyond the comprehension of and hence could not have served any real purpose for these ancient Christians — a matter taken up in Section 2.3. Surely, this is an exaggerated assertion. To demonstrate that both are Christian texts and that, generally speaking, their contents are intelligible, in the course of my research I have re-read the manuscripts, incorporated the latest exegetical works and prepared a synopsis that not only reflects their textual structures but also enables readers to match their contents readily with the original columns.

⁷ A.C. Moule 1930:58. See also footnotes 17 and 18 in the Introduction to this dissertation.

⁸ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1926:125-127. For a short summary, see also Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:212-228).

⁹ The scribe was gifted with good artistic taste. His calligraphy is rather elegant. For more detail, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:189-228), Luo Xianglin 羅香林 (1966:32), and Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1927/1980:98).

2.2.1 Four sections of *The Messiah Sutra*

The Messiah Sutra retells the Gospel stories and many parts can be traced back to the Bible. In terms of content, it can be divided into four sections.

2.2.1.1 The title: *The Messiah Sutra*

The title, *The Messiah Sutra*, is contained in the opening column that also gives the length of the manuscript (one roll) — *xuting mishishuo jing yijuan* (序聽迷詩所經一卷). Despite its brevity, this title presents difficulties and has elicited no fewer than four theories in an attempt to solve them.

The first explanation is the ‘error’ theory postulated by Haneda Toru whose basic assertion is that the first five characters are non-standard Chinese transcriptions of Jesus the Messiah.¹⁰ Although this theory is generally accepted, its most serious defect is that *xuting* and Jesus do not match each other phonetically and that the transcription of Messiah in the main text (彌師訶) is different and seems to be correct — see the quotation below.¹¹ On the basis of this error theory, the second hypothesis asserts that these glaring mistakes in key theological terms in the title suggest that the source was not made by a pious believer but by an ignorant forger.¹² However, this forgery theory, as will be argued below, is untenable. Another viewpoint is the ‘correct’ theory that alleges that none of the characters is an error because they do not mean Jesus the Messiah. Zhao Bichu argues that *xuting* may be related to the Greek word “SOTAIR” (σωτήρ) that means Savior and *mishisuo* is the Greek word “MESSON” (μέσον) that means middle; Wu Changxing, on the other hand, associates the title with Syriac, claiming that *xuting* is “zedikā” (ܙܕܝܟܐ) and *mishisuo* “metsāyā” (ܡܬܫܝܐ).¹³ Although the ‘correct’ theory seems to solve the problem of the ‘wrong’ characters, it still cannot explain why *mishisuo* does not sound closer to Messiah than it does to either μέσον or ܡܬܫܝܐ.

Finally, the fourth theory seems to make the most sense. Accepting the premise that *mishisuo* corresponds to Messiah, this theory points out that *xu* means a narrative or an account whereas *ting* is taken in its common meaning of to hear. Therefore, the title is: Narrate the

¹⁰ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1926:127-128.

¹¹ For instance, P.Y. Saeki was influenced by Haneda Toru. He (1951:147) wrote that *xuting* would have been pronounced “‘Jo-cho’ in Japanese and ‘Ye-chu’ in Old Chinese, and can correctly be identified with the Chinese sound ‘Ye-su’ of the T’ang Dynasty.” See also A.C. Moule (1930:59).

¹² Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:228.

¹³ Wu Changxing 吳昶興 2010b:240-241; Zhao Bichu 趙璧礎 1998:38. The first Syriac word means justice and the second mediator. The Greek word, σωτήρ, shall be transcribed as SŌTĒR.

Heard Messiah Sutra. This interpretation was first proposed a century ago by J.M. Menzies, who was inspired by the first sentence of *The Messiah Sutra* that imitates the opening of Buddhist sutras: “At that time the Messiah expounded” (爾時彌師訶說).¹⁴ Lately, this theory has been reinforced by Xiang Bingguang who has found that a number of Tang essays, including later texts, use *xu* in a similar way. Xiang Bingguang claims that the title could mean “Document *The Messiah Sutra* That Has Been Recounted” (記敘所聽到的迷詩所經).¹⁵ I tend to lean toward this theory, despite its imperfections. Most importantly, it does not explain why the word Messiah was transcribed differently in the same manuscript.

2.2.1.2 Section Two: theological themes

The second section expounds on the many theological themes used in the manuscript, among them God, evil, the use of idols and the like.

Cols. 2 – mid-40: God, “*tianzun*” (天尊), a common Daoist term for the highest deity who is invisible, like the wind. He creates life and rules the world.¹⁶

Cols. end-40 – end-43: Evil is the fruit of one’s previous sinful actions.

Cols. 44 – end-52: Ignorant humans make statues of elephants, cows and other animals. The use of statues made of clay, wood, gold, silver and copper is foolish.

Cols. end-52 – mid-62: To follow the teaching of God is good. To serve God is to obey His commands.

Cols. end-62 – mid-81: Obeying the emperor and respecting one’s parents are all facets of service to God. However, to serve God comes first, loyalty second and filial piety third.

Cols. end-81 – mid-92: The Chinese version of the Ten Commandments, called The Ten Vows (十願) — for example, be loyal to the emperor, be filial to parents, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not covet another’s property or one’s neighbor’s wife and house and do not bear false witness against others.

¹⁴ J.M. Menzies’ suggestion is cited from F.S. Drake (1935a:679). For the original Chinese, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:387, Col.2).

¹⁵ Xiang Bingguang 項秉光 2011:18.

¹⁶ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:387, Col.2.

Cols. end-92 – mid-113: Explains other commands from the teachings of Jesus or created for a particular occasion: do not exploit the weak, help the poor and the sick, do not gossip, do not be an instigator of evil and the like.

2.2.1.3 Section Three: a transitional part

The third section is a short transitional passage, linking the second section to the Gospel stories.

Cols. Mid-113 – mid-115: Humans do not obey the teachings in the second section. Nevertheless God shows mercy and admonishes humans to do good deeds but humans still do not heed God's words.

Cols. end-115 – 122: Therefore, God commands a “cool wind” (涼風) to enter a virgin whose name is “Mary” (末艷).¹⁷ The resultant miraculous pregnancy makes humans realize God's might. God instructs people to return to the good karma.

2.2.1.4 Section Four: Gospel stories

The fourth section contains the Gospel stories about Jesus Christ. Lately this section has received considerable attention. It seems to hold critical information about the authenticity of the two sources. Skeptical scholars have asserted that the corrupt phonetic transcriptions of Syriac and Persian names suggest that the sources must be modern forgeries, whereas mainstream scholars point out that the transcriptions in fact show their authenticity because very few people would have mastered these ancient languages in the early twentieth century. For more detail, see 2.3.

Cols. 123 – 139: The birth of Jesus the Messiah around “Jerusalem” (烏梨師斂), Jesus' childhood and baptism including His temptation.¹⁸

Cols. 140 – end-152: The ministry of Jesus (particularly, His healing and teaching).

Cols. end-152 – 170: The trial and crucifixion of Jesus at the hands of “Pilatus” (毗羅都思) and the resurrection — the tomb is open and rocks fall away.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 397, Cols.115, 116.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 398, Col. 127.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Col.153.

2.2.2 The Four parts of *On One God*

On One God also has four parts: three titled essays plus the source's general title, *On One God*. Although the essays appear to have been arranged in a fairly slipshod fashion (Part II comes before Part I), all are devoted to one single theme that is indicated by the general title: the One God.²⁰

2.2.2.1 Essay One: The Parable, II

Part 1 is the first essay entitled The Parable, II (喻第二).²¹

Cols. 1 – end-4: The One God created all things. All things visible and invisible reveal the One God.

Cols. end-4 – end-23: God's unseen and yet mighty power. All things are sustained by this power; just as the unseen strength of the archer propels the flying arrow. Humans have no other resting place but in the sustaining power of God. This divine power of the One God is possessed by no other god.

Cols. end-23 – mid-60: the content of these columns is heavily theological and philosophical. The author struggles to explain the dichotomy: visible and invisible, by comparing it with the body-soul and host-visitor relationship. God is visible and invisible. All things (the visible and invisible) spring from one source. Body and soul together constitute humans, and neither is complete without the other.

Col. mid-60: the title of this part, The Parable, II.

2.2.2.2 Essay Two: On One Heaven, I

Part 2 is On One Heaven, I (一天論第一).²² As pointed by F.S. Drake, this essay has two sub-themes:²³

Sub-theme One is about theological dichotomies — visible and invisible, male and female, body and soul among other topics.

²⁰ According to P.Y. Saeki (1951:6), the essays are “tracts” or *logdia*, short pieces of writing on religious subjects.

²¹ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:355, Col.60.

²² *Ibid.*, 368, Col.206.

²³ F.S. Drake 1935a:684-685.

Cols. 61 – 76: Man is made of the visible and of the invisible. All things, visible and invisible, were created by no other god but by the One God Whose power like the wind is invisible to the human eye.

Cols. 77 – end-114: Humans were created by God in two kinds (sexes). Body and soul are interdependent. Their relationship resembles the relationship of a wheat kernel to the earth, and of host to a guest.

Cols. end-114 – mid-142: We must all pass hither (此處) and thither (彼處).²⁴ We are born here to sow the seeds of goodness that will bear fruit there. It is here that all good deeds must be performed and all spiritual discipline and worship must be accomplished; it will be too late if left until we have gone hence.

Sub-theme Two is about the mighty work of salvation of the One God.

Cols. end-142 – end-157: From the One God Himself proceeds the holy work of transformation. He bears the sufferings of all humans. Worship of the One God and the keeping of His commandments is the foundation of all true merit. To see God, one must be pure in heart.

Cols. end-157 – end-181: The many races of humankind are all in the likeness of the One God, and all are cherished by Him, and will be judged by Him at the End of Time. The Holy One is wise, complete and eternal. God is mightier than all emperors. To adhere to other gods is foolish and is to be led astray by devils who become the adversaries of humankind by taking advantage of human stupidity.

Cols. end-181 – 205: Humans can turn to the ways of evil. They fall from Heaven and dwell with “Satan” (參怒) who has deluded foolish people and turned them against the One God.²⁵ People perverted by devils do not revere the One God and fall into “three evil ways” (三惡道, a Buddhist term).²⁶ As a consequence, they will be reborn only in a lowly position. The One God is good and is loving. Devils confound and pervert people. Those who follow the One God will be sanctified.

Col. 206: The title of this essay, *On One Heaven, I*.

²⁴ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:360, Cols.118,119.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 367, Col.194.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 368, Col.200.

2.2.2.3 Essay Three: *Shizun* On Almsgiving, III

Part 3 is the final essay, *Shizun* on Almsgiving, III (世尊布施論第三).²⁷ As pointed out by P.Y. Saeki, the first phrase, *shizun*, is an epithet for Buddha that is also used to designate Jesus, and the second phrase, *bushi*, the Chinese translation of the Buddhist term for almsgiving, is one deed that is mandatory to achieve salvation.²⁸

Col. 207: the title of this part, *Shizun* on Almsgiving, III.

Cols. 208 – end-249: generally speaking these columns seem to be subjects that are treated in Verse 1 of Chapter Six to Verse 14 of Chapter 7 in the Gospel according to Matthew plus parts of the Sermon on the Mount: almsgiving, worship, laying up of treasure, the search for food and clothing, judging others, casting pearls before swine, questing after knowledge and knocking on the door, and the choice between the broad and the narrow paths. Dispersed among these columns is the work of the One God: the One God gives us everything; other gods give nothing.

Cols. 250 – end-344: The ministry, betrayal, trial and death of the Messiah, the sin of Adam, the Incarnation and the Redemption. The Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Great Commission, the promise of the Holy Spirit, the Ascension and the conquest of death through faith in the Messiah. The gift of the Holy Spirit, namely: the manifestation of the Messiah in the world to bring Judgment and to grant men the gift of everlasting life. The devils that incite hatred against the disciples of the Messiah.

Cols. 345 — mid-376: The punishment of the “Jews” (石忽人) and the martyrdom of Christians.²⁹ The Second Coming and the work of Salvation. Persecution in the “Roman Empire” (?) (拂林) and in Persia.³⁰ The holy and mighty power of the One God.

Cols. end-376 — 404: Salvation: righteous living, reliance upon the One God, performing the Will of the One God, knowing the One God, freedom from false religion and from fear of men and of devils, faith. Troubles that will be caused by the devils in the Last Days. The Last Judgment (the fate that will befall the good and the evil in Heaven and in Hell.)

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Col.207.

²⁸ P.Y. Saeki 1951:231-232.

²⁹ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:381, Col.343-344.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 382, Col.354.

2.2.2.4 The title: On One God

The final part of *On One God* is contained in the very last column, Col.405, “On One God, Roll III” (一神論卷第三).³¹ This short title ends the whole manuscript and seems to imply that the preceding manuscript has come down to us in a complete form. Nevertheless, the title ‘Roll III’ suggests that there could have been other rolls in the same series.

2.3 Rejecting the forgery theory

Since the first publications, little doubt has been cast on the authenticity of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. In the 1990s, however, in the wake of the rise of a more general interest in the presence of forgeries in the collections of Dunhuang manuscripts a few scholars began to question their authenticity. Skeptics asserted that a number of indications suggest that both manuscripts were copied in the early twentieth century.

This section is devoted to a discussion of this thesis and begins by tracking the path of its emergence, followed by an outline of the alleged indications and ends with an exposé of the weakness of these premises. The long and the short of its argument is that the forgery theory is not substantiated by any evidence and that none of the arguments adduced is convincing. Later, the dissertation will rely on more findings in its refutation of this theory.

2.3.1 The emergence of the forgery theory

Probably because Dunhuang Cave 17 was only opened in 1900 and most manuscripts were afterwards rapidly transported to Europe by Aurel Stein and Paul Pelliot, no questions about the forging of these sources rippled the waters of scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century. The first suspicions began to make themselves felt when more Dunhuang manuscripts appeared on the market after WWII and they were strengthened every time a newly reported manuscript displayed textual and codicological features that deviated from texts already in well-known collections. Qualms were reinforced when scholars unexpectedly discovered that even the finest collections like that kept in the British Library contain a number of fakes. At that point the issue of forgery in the whole Dunhuang hoard suddenly became a matter of some urgency. In 1997, the Chinese Department of the British Library decided to accord the issue proper public attention. It organized a workshop and then published a monograph that establishes that a number of documents had indeed been forged

³¹ *Ibid.*, 386.

in the early twentieth century and that the bulk of the dubious examples were those manuscripts that had been purchased from private organizations, unknown owners and in antiquities markets.³²

It is in the throes of this scholarly furore that two Chinese scholars, Rong Xinjiang and Lin Wushu, raised the possibility that the Tang Christian manuscripts were forgeries at the time they were doing research in London in 1991. According to an anecdote recalled by Rong Xinjiang at the celebration of Lin Wushu's seventieth birthday (2013), two matters in particular caught their attention.³³ One is that only Manuscript P.3847 has a known history; all the other six manuscripts were obtained from mysterious vendors and collectors whose background would not bear investigation. The other is that whereas P.3847 is very short, the other manuscripts are comparatively long. "Therefore," Rong Xinjiang writes, "I suspect that some of these said privately collected Christian manuscripts might be forgeries" (因此我懷疑，這些散藏的所謂景教寫本中是不是存有偽造的呢？).³⁴ When Rong Xinjiang voiced his suspicions, Lin Wushu concurred with him. They planned to scrutinize each manuscript. However, probably because of the tight research schedule as visiting scholars, they just skimmed *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* and focused in detail on Kojima Manuscripts A and B, co-authoring an article that convincingly exposes that the Kojima manuscripts are indeed modern forgeries — for details, see Chapter 6.

The forgery issue was also brought to Wu Qiyu's attention when Lin Wushu left London for Paris. Wu Qiyu (d. 2011) was a leading expert on Dunhuang manuscripts and he agreed with Lin Wushu and Rong Xinjiang on many points. "Wu Qiyu clued [hinted] to me," Lin Wushu recalls, "that these two documents [*The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*] were forgeries, but he also said that it is very difficult to prove this."³⁵

At this early stage, scholars still trod cautiously and did not rush to publish any articles, probably because no one yet possessed any hard evidence. After almost a decade of simmering the forgery issue was finally brought to the boil by Lin Wushu. In the opening years of this new century, he published three articles in quick succession, announcing that both the manuscripts are modern forgeries. He began with an examination of *On One God* in 2000 and later in 2001 argued that *The Messiah Sutra* was also a forgery. He brought the forgery issue

³² This workshop was entitled *Forgeries of Dunhuang Manuscripts in the Early Twentieth Century* (June 30 - July 1). The curator of the Stein Collections in the British Museum, Susan Whitfield (2002), was commissioned to edit the workshop papers. For more details, see also Rong Xinjiang (2013:501-523).

³³ For this anecdote, see Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (2014:268-271).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 269.

³⁵ Lin Wushu 2006:133. For Wu Qiyu's works, see <http://www.crcao.fr/spip.php?article513&lang=fr>.

into the world arena when he wrote some additional notes and sent them in an English presentation to the First Salzburg Conference on the Church of the East held in 2003.³⁶

Since this initial productive period, Lin Wushu has continued to work on reinforcing this theory to the present day. He carefully considers comments, most of them passed on in private, and makes slight adjustments to his words in order to polish them and to attain greater precision. In a careful application of these processes, he has republished the initial three articles in his books, and has continued to give lectures on the forgery issue in symposiums.³⁷ In addition, he has summarized the main elements of his theory in several other articles, frequently reminding the scholarly world to “study and distinguish [determine] the authenticity of the documents [rather] than [to] engage in endless arguments [about] or deliberate search for explanations” of how to interpret their contents.³⁸

2.3.2 The arguments propounded by the forgery theory

Despite minor rewordings, the gist of the forgery theory does not vary in the different (re)publications. In brief, this theory alleges: Both *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were made in China in the early twentieth century by someone who relied on ancient Christian sources; some of which might even have been Tang Christian texts. To get a feel for his argument, we can refer to the following conclusion about the authenticity of *On One God*, that is known as the Tomeoka Document. It first appeared in 2000 and was republished in 2011. It also has been excerpted in studies of the authenticity of *The Messiah Sutra*:³⁹

The Tomeoka Document is not an authentic Dunhuang manuscript. It was copied in the early twentieth century. Nevertheless, the forgery was not pure invention. The forger(s) relied on ancient source(s). As for the ancient source(s), the Jesuits' works of the Late-Ming-Early-Qing period [the seventeenth century] cannot be excluded with absolute certainty. It is highly probable that the Dunhuang hoard contained some other Tang Christian sources in addition to the widely known Christian manuscripts. The texts of these sources would have resembled *On One God* and these fell into dealers' hands. As they were damaged and would not have fetched a good price, veteran forger(s) recopied them and made a new manuscript. The Tomeoka Document must be one of the masterpieces produced by these veterans. As [I was] earnestly instructed by my mentor Cai Hongsheng, it is a “perfect forgery.” (富岡文書並非敦煌本真跡，而是 20 世紀初葉時人所抄寫；但其並非憑空臆作，而是有古本可依。這古本，當然不排除明季清初耶穌會士的作品；但更有可能是，在當年問世的敦煌遺書中，除了眾所周知的景教寫本外，還有類似《一神論》之類內容的一些景教寫經，落入骨[古]

³⁶ Lin Wushu 2006; Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2001, 2000.

³⁷ For these republications, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2011b:324-380, 2005a:215-226, 2003:186-228). For the conference presentation in Research of Chinese Religious Documents (November 18-21, 2004), see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2004:142-143). This meeting was held in Kyoto. A report of it can be downloaded from Kyoto University database: <http://repository.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/dspace/handle/2433/65875>.

³⁸ Lin Wushu 2006:133. For these summaries, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2005a:183-188, 2002:266-269).

³⁹ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2011:342-343, 2003:206, 2000:81.

董商人之手，但過於殘爛，在當時難以鬻得好價，遂由造假高手重新加以謄寫製作。富岡文書就是該等高手的傑作之一；如業師蔡鴻生先生所提命，是件“精抄贗品”。)

The forgery theory, its advocates claim, rests on a number of clues that range from early-twentieth-century forgery practice in China to textual indications in the manuscripts. Below, I shall begin by summarizing the six main arguments abstracted from Lin Wushu's many publications and then add a few more put forward by Rong Xinjiang and Hidemi Takahashi.

1. An argument based on authority: A few scholars seem to support the forgery theory in one way or another. Besides Wu Qiyu, Peter Hofrichter e-mailed Lin Wushu stating that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* “are ‘too Catholic’” (過於‘天主教’), suggesting that these two sources were not a product of the Church of the East.⁴⁰ Cai Hongsheng also agrees with Lin Wushu. He coined the most memorable summary of the theory when he stated that we are dealing with “a perfect forgery”.

2. Dubious discovery and ownership. All the information about the collection, Lin Wushu protests, came from Haneda Toru. “Reliable and supportive documentation appears to be lacking” (似乏堅實可靠的背景資料作支撐).⁴¹ In dealing with “any so-called ‘Dunhuang documents’ whose origin [discovery] is obscure and whose authenticity cannot be confirmed, we must keep [remain] alert and distinguish [investigate] them carefully. Especially [... when] those documents [... are of] important academic value, we cannot not relax our vigilance.”⁴²

3. Historical background and technical feasibility. “China has a very rich tradition of forging” using sophisticated techniques, and the forgery business was certainly alive and well in the early twentieth century fed by the huge demand for Dunhuang manuscripts.⁴³ Meanwhile, some genuine Christian manuscripts had been obtained by the famous collector, Li Shengduo 李盛鐸 (1859-1937), and many scholars (for example, Luo Xianglin in China and Paul Pelliot in Europe) were very keen to study Tang Christianity. “So,” Lin Wushu argues, “it could have been some modern people who forged the ancient manuscripts for money.”⁴⁴

4. “Since the ‘Kojima Manuscripts’ are forged, it proves that those professional forgers had actually aimed at [set eyes on] Nestorian manuscripts.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2005a:220.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2003:194; 2000:73.

⁴² Lin Wushu 2006:136.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

5. The contrast between appearance and composition. Lin Wushu thinks that the neat, elegant appearance of the calligraphy is too good to be true. His first point is that not a single character has been “modified” in these two long manuscripts. “The intention [in keeping the manuscripts so neat] is determined by profit [,] if not by religious piety.”⁴⁶ Having made this point, he goes on and argues that, despite their neatness, there are too many ‘wrongly written’ characters and broken sentences. Moreover, the same character has been written in different forms and those used for key theological phrases have even been dropped. The contrast, according to Lin Wushu, is so stark that:⁴⁷

Examining its appearance, we can confirm that the copier was a Tang Christian who was not only very pious but also well educated; exploring the composition, however, [we] can ascertain that the copier was not a Tang Christian and he might even have known nothing at all about Tang Christianity. 觀其外貌，我們可以認定抄經人是一位很虔誠、很有文化修養的景教徒；窺其內涵，則可以肯定抄經人並非景教徒，甚至對景教一竅不通。

6. Anachronistic contents. Lin Wushu argues that “some expressions [used in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*] were of a later date than other Chinese Nestorian documents”, supposedly made in the eighth century.⁴⁸ He doubts that either “Aluoben, in the middle of 7th century, was ahead of his time or the modern people made the forgery.”⁴⁹

Lately, Rong Xinjiang has added three more arguments. He emphasizes that the Tang court established strict rules for “translating foreign religious doctrines” (外來宗教經典的翻譯); therefore the ‘wrongly written’ characters, the disordered structures and other peculiarities suggest that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* cannot be “official Christian Tang texts” (唐朝正規的景教經典) used by Aluoben in his discussions with Emperor Tang Taizong.⁵⁰ In his second point he turns to official Tang rules and procedures that demanded that the nomenclatures be “highly standardized” (高度統一); the rub is that this consistency does not carry over to some key theological terms (like Messiah) in the two Christian texts.⁵¹ Thirdly, he turns to codicology and stresses that many Tang religious manuscripts sanctioned by the government were written on good paper, and yet the first piece of *On One God* is on “coarse

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁷ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:197.

⁴⁸ Lin Wushu 2006:139.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁰ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 2014:282, 285.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 285.

paper of a dry-grass color” (‘麤紙，柴色’), consequently differing from the other pieces in terms of quality and color.⁵²

Finally, Hidemi Takahashi has suggested that certain phonetic transcriptions of proper names show that the sources are forgeries.⁵³ He notes that a number of transcriptions are “closer to the Syriac in their Middle Chinese forms than in their modern forms”, whereas the Middle Chinese pronunciations of a few transcriptions do not match their Syriac counterparts.⁵⁴ For example, the name of John the Baptist occurs three times in *The Messiah Sutra*. In the first instance it is *ruohun* 若昏; in the other two occurrences *yuhun* 谷昏 — I suspect that *yu* 谷 is an error for *ruo* 若. Hidemi Takahashi argues that *yuhun* “is no closer to the Syriac ‘Yōḥannān’ (cf. sogd. ywhnn) in its Middle Chinese pronunciation than in the modern” Chinese; *ruohun* “is further away in both [Middle and Modern Chinese]”.⁵⁵ “Such instances”, Hidemi Takahashi concludes, “suggest that the text [*The Messiah Sutra*] has been corrupted, giving support to Lin’s view of the manuscripts as being later forgeries.”⁵⁶

2.3.3 A critique of the forgery theory

The forgery theory has been contested by a number of scholars. In their research Zhang Xuefeng and Wu Changxing have concentrated on investigating the transcription of names. They claim that few people in the early twentieth century would have been able to deal with Chinese, Syriac and Middle Persian, and that a number of transcriptions do match ancient pronunciations almost perfectly. They argue that (some of) the contents must have been created in Tang China.⁵⁷ Moreover, Wang Lanping has examined the inconsistency in the writing of the characters. He finds that orthographic variants, including those analyzed by Lin Wushu, are not ‘wrong’ at all, because they were in popular use in and after Tang China. He also points out that a character was not always written in one particular form in many Dunhuang manuscripts. His conclusion is that the two sources are “not forgeries” (非偽).⁵⁸

When it is all said and done, the forgery theory does not stand up to scrutiny. Some of the reasoning put forward, for instance, Nos 1 and 3, are not arguments in themselves: the first is

⁵² *Ibid.*, 287. For the observation on paper, see Takeda Science Foundation 武田科学振興財団 (2012:88). Many thanks to Hidemi Takahashi and Hsiang-ming Chang for helping me to type the character *chu* 麤.

⁵³ Hidemi Takahashi 2014, 2013, 2008.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2013:15.

⁵⁵ The character 谷, according to Hidemi Takahashi (2013:16), should be pronounced *yu*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* There are two other similar cases: *xusuo* 序娑 used in *The Messiah Sutra* and *kenu yishu* 客怒翳數 used in *On One God*. They are believed to be related to the word Jesus.

⁵⁷ Zhang Xuefeng 張雪松 2016:51-52; Wu Changxing 吳昶興 2010a:13-14, 32-33; 2007:105-106.

⁵⁸ Wang Lanping 王蘭平 2016b:33. For an expanded discussion, see Wang Lanping 王蘭平 (2016a:54-123).

a simple appeal to authority; the latter at best shows that forgeries were indeed made in twentieth-century China, a fact that was already known and is without any further significance. Argument No. 4 merely reveals possibilities. All the other arguments, like the observations about the paper, structures and standardized nomenclatures, are based heavily on the conventional assumption that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were the earliest official texts used by Aluoben in his discussions with Tang Taizong, a contention that will be refuted by this research. More problematically, the forgery theory is based on several other unfounded presuppositions, although the skeptics rarely admit as much.

The first premise concerns the poorly documented discovery. It is worth recalling that documenting discoveries was not seen as important until archeology was transformed into a highly disciplined branch of scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century. To the early-twentieth-century scholars, including archeologists and collectors, documenting was not routine but a task newly added to the already heavy load of their duties. It would be impossible to expect that these early scholars would have recorded their discoveries as minutely as we do today.

Other, rather parlous, assumptions are based on the alleged contrast between appearance and composition (including calligraphy). It is presupposed: 1. Good calligraphy suggests that the calligrapher is well educated and consequently well versed in Chinese; 2. Even the most pious and assiduous of copiers would inevitably have made and corrected errors when they were copying religious doctrines; 3. A source with handsome appearance should contain unambiguous contents and well-arranged structures; 4. As we cannot decipher these sources today, the ancient Christians did not understand these sources either. However, none of these assumptions is convincing. For example, many present-day Chinese PhD students (myself included) are not skilled in refined calligraphy, whereas numerous calligraphers with a limited education sell their works at unbelievably high prices in China. Examining these assumptions, although the latter two seem the stronger, they are probably the weaker. Admittedly, the two Christian texts resist a simple interpretation. But what ancient source is easy to read today? Language is constantly changing. Orthographies, vocabularies, meanings and many other aspects all change considerably over time. Given these changes, none of the old texts is transparent and straightforward to any of today's readers, including experts. To comprehend an ancient text, regardless whether that text is written in Chinese, Syriac, Arabic, Greek, Latin or Coptic or any other language, requires vast knowledge and special training. Therefore, difficulty in decipherment is not because the texts ARE really difficult. The difficulty

is far more readily attributable to our limited knowledge of ancient languages and backgrounds — the following chapters will demonstrate this point. Nevertheless, what should never be lost sight of is that what is difficult for us to understand today was not necessarily difficult for ancient people to read and comprehend.

In sum, no decisive evidence has ever been produced to support the notion that the two texts are twentieth-century forgeries. The weakness of the arguments for the forgery is in itself sufficient basis to continue to regard these texts as genuine, and the remainder of this dissertation will prove beyond reasonable doubt that there is decisive proof *against* any theory that these texts are late forgeries.

2.4 The tenuous conventional chronology

Neither *The Messiah Sutra* nor *On One God* carries a date. Their chronology was assigned when they were first published in the early twentieth century. In order to demonstrate more exactly that the traditional dating is tenuous, this section will briefly introduce their common dates and the literature, after which it will scrutinize the arguments one by one.

2.4.1 The popular dates

It is said that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were translated by Aluoben and were used in his discussions with Emperor Tang Taizong. More precisely, the former was created between 635 and 638; the latter in 641. Together the two sources are commonly known as Aluoben's documents, a label coined by P.Y. Saeki in 1937.⁵⁹

This time-frame, the 640s, has so far never been seriously challenged. In the early years, for instance, it was upheld by P.Y. Saeki's contemporaries. A.C. Moule writes that the two texts "have been with some reason dated about 640, or not more than five years after the arrival of the mission in 635".⁶⁰ Even those who have criticized the exact dates have in principle agreed with this dating, and have merely proposed minor revisions. For example, John Foster notes that the date of *The Messiah Sutra* is based on the accustomed calculation of the Christian era. "The earlier Patristic tradition," he argues, "placed the birth of our Lord from two to three years earlier. The year 641 thus becomes 638."⁶¹

⁵⁹ P.Y. Saeki (1937/1951:8) employed the old transcription, Alopen.

⁶⁰ A.C. Moule 1940:13-14.

⁶¹ John Foster 1939:47, *sic*.

This chronology was also unanimously accepted by the second-generation researchers. Among them are Peter C.H. Chiu, Samuel Hugh Moffett and Ian Gillman in the West and Gong Tianmin, Luo Xianglin, Jiang Wenhan and Weng Shaojun in China.⁶² As pointed out in the above, this universal acceptance could at least be attributed in part to the fact that the manuscripts had become inaccessible in the aftermath of WWII, and many scholars, especially those who cannot read Chinese, have been forced to quote P.Y. Saeki, including his errors.

In the current surge of interest stimulated by the growing number of Chinese Christians, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are still overwhelmingly believed by present-day scholars to “constitute the first statement of the Christian faith” in China.⁶³ With the exception of Matteo Nicolini-Zani who has been mentioned in the Introduction to this dissertation, as far as I know, only Pénélope Riboud has openly cast some doubts on the dating, even though a lack of space did not permit her to set out her reasons in full and pursue her conclusion. The specific dates of the two sources, she states, “are rather uncertain”.⁶⁴

2.4.2 The problematic arguments

The above dating, its advocates point out, has been extrapolated from a number of indications contained in the manuscripts themselves supported by a few additional sources. However, not a single indication withstands closer scrutiny.

2.4.2.1 Three inconclusive arguments about *On One God's* date

Its proponents argue that the date of *On One God* is suggested by three strands of textual evidence. Two frequently cited pieces, in which he acknowledges Haneda Toru's contribution, are neatly summarized by P.Y. Saeki:⁶⁵

Regarding the date and the authorship, however, no specialist has as yet committed himself to declare his judgment, except Prof. Haneda [Toru] who pointed out the fact that [... *On One God*] contains the following passages: “Though it is only 641 years since the time of the birth of the Messiah, ‘consisting of the five attributes’, yet (His name) is known in all parts of the world.” [... The other] passage [is], “A point of space in the world of tangibility, for instance, is like the point between Persia and Fu-lin (i.e., Ephraim).” [...] And judging from these passages it is right that Prof. Haneda [Toru] should declare that [... *On One God*] must have been originally written in 641 A.D., at a certain place situated somewhere on this side of the Persian Territory.

⁶² Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit 1999:275-278; Samuel Hugh Moffett 1998:291-314; Peter C.H. Chiu 1987:173-211; Weng Shaojun 翁紹軍 1996:13-16, 111-155; Jiang Wenhan 江文漢 1982:59; Luo Xianglin 羅香林 1966:32-33; Gong Tianmin 龔天民 1960:24-29.

⁶³ Jean-Pierre Charbonnier 2007:44.

⁶⁴ Pénélope Riboud 2001:5.

⁶⁵ P.Y. Saeki 1951:114.

The third piece of evidence is that the Liao people (遼人, Khitans?) are disparaged as swine (豬). P.Y. Saeki claims that this derogative usage was related to a specific historical event: Tang Taizong began his campaign to conquer the Liao area in 631 but encountered massive resistance. The Liao people, P.Y. Saeki explains,⁶⁶

had become the object of hatred and contempt to the Chinese people with their capital in Ch'angan. It would be no surprise at all to find "the people of Liao" used as the synonym of the word "swine" as we do here. On the other hand, the Nestorian Mission met with a cordial reception of the Emperor T'ai-tsung in 635 A.D., and the Scripture began to be translated into Chinese under the auspices of the Emperor who sent the expedition army to Liao-tung in 641 A.D. Under these circumstances it might not have been impossible that the Chinese officials and courtiers with whom our author had to do [a] great deal might have called the enemy "people of Liao" by the name of "swine" as is often the case with the Chinese who call the enemy by very nasty names such as "vermin" or "swine."

Basically, P.Y. Saeki is claiming that, under the auspices of imperial patronage, Aluoben was simply following the then trendy practice of Chinese officials and dismissed the Liao people as pigs. Consequently, in P.Y. Saeki's opinion, this derogatory usage suggests that *On One God* was created in this period.

However, none of these three strands of evidence is conclusive. The original Chinese text is very difficult to punctuate. The immediate meaning of its context is unclear. P.Y. Saeki's reading of the Chinese, including Haneda Toru's Japanese publications, could have been more accurate. For example, the third piece of evidence very probably has nothing to do with the 630 conquest at all. The derogatory association of 'the Liao people' and 'swine', as pointed out by A.C. Moule, was proverbial. It was a term of abuse that had been in use since the fifth century as shown by the historical account *The Houhanshu* 後漢書.⁶⁷

Turning to the second argument, parsing the original Chinese is exhausting. Usually, three or four complete columns offer enough information to punctuate ancient texts; however, these four columns are (virtually) unsolvable: "無接界一處兩處第一第二時節可接界/處喻如從此至波斯亦如從波斯至拂林無/接界時節如聖主風化見今從此無接界亦/不起作第一第二亦復不得此一神因此既無."⁶⁸ It took me a while to match P.Y. Saeki's translation to the underlined Chinese. Importantly, this passage deals with space or location. It has nothing to do with the time of the writing of *On One God*. Not to put too fine a point on it, P.Y. Saeki misread Haneda Toru's argument. Haneda Toru took it as an indication of where *On One God*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 236, note 13.

⁶⁷ A.C. Moule 1940:17.

⁶⁸ The Chinese is cited from Cols. 39-42. See Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:353).

was made: a place east of Persia. He does not relate this evidence to the time of the making the source at all.⁶⁹ I shall discuss this point in more detail below.

Finally, let us deal with the first argument, the one that seems to carry the most weight. Unquestionably the original Chinese, *liu bai sishiyi nian* 六百四十一年, does contain a time. However, the nub of the problem is that it is hard to ascertain whether it is a date, the year 641 or a time-span consisting of 641 years. Should it be a time-span, it is not clear which specific year was taken as the starting point from which to calculate it. The surrounding Chinese text is obscure. Indeed, the texts are so ambiguous that I do not feel confident to offer any punctuation here. Even if one accepts P.Y. Saeki's punctuation, “弥[彌]師訶向天下見也。向五蔭身六百四十一年不過。已於一切處。” his version of the Chinese, unlike his above underlined English translation (Though it is only 641 years since the time of the birth of the Messiah, 'consisting of the five attributes', yet (His name) is known in all parts of the world.), is far from clear.⁷⁰ The last two parts of P.Y. Saeki's Chinese punctuation are ungrammatical and unintelligible. Some elements have been dropped. The second part, for instance, is meaningful only if (1) the verb *xian* 見 ('to give birth' in P.Y. Saeki's English) is inserted after *wuyinshen* 五蔭身 ('the five attributes') and (2) the final phrase *buguo* 不過 ('only') is moved from the end of the sentence to a position before the Chinese numeral 641: 向五蔭身[見不過]六百四十一年. Even after such a complex reconstruction, however, the third part fails to make sense. To his credit, it seems that P.Y. Saeki was aware of the difficulty and did try to tackle the obscurity of this third part. To make his English translation intelligible, he surreptitiously interpolated “His Name”, a phrase that does not appear in the original Chinese at all.

Moreover, P.Y. Saeki tries to convey that Haneda Toru was confident about his interpretation of the Chinese time, 641. However, a rereading of the literature shows that it is obvious that Haneda Toru was by no means convinced of his own interpretation. There are various indications that support this contention. Firstly, Haneda Toru dealt with the chronology of *On One God* only very briefly. Secondly, the fairly conspicuous Chinese numeral curiously escaped his initial attention. In 1918, he mentions in passing that the source is “a Tang manuscript” (唐代の寫本).⁷¹ In 1923, for the first time, he quotes the Chinese numeral and assigns the year 641 to *On One God*. However, this dating only appears in a page-long summary of a report on

⁶⁹ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1923:157.

⁷⁰ P.Y. Saeki 1951:66 (Chinese text).

⁷¹ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1918:142.

the Tang church presented at the meeting of The Society of Historical Research.⁷² In 1931, Haneda Toru mentioned this evidence again. But again he was sparing in his comments, and did not offer any arguments or justification for his punctuation of the text.⁷³ Most importantly, Haneda Toru actually refused to assign the date 641 to *The Messiah Sutra*. Instead, in 1926 he first suggested that *The Messiah Sutra* had been written “pre-mid-Tang China [mid-eighth century]” (中唐代時代以前), and then vaguely rephrases this claim in 1931: the source was created by “early” (初期) Tang Christians.⁷⁴ Given that Haneda Toru clearly knew that the two Christian sources were written in the same hand and display some textual similarities, it is rather odd that he, should he have been comfortable with the date ‘641’ of *On One God*, did not claim that *The Messiah Sutra* was also made around 641.

2.4.2.2 Three dubious observations about *The Messiah Sutra*’s date

First of all, the date of *The Messiah Sutra*, 635-638, was first systematically proposed by P.Y. Saeki. In 1937, P.Y. Saeki observed that “Prof. Haneda [Toru] somehow refrained from expressing his own view definitely regarding the date and the authorship of” *The Messiah Sutra*, and therefore he claims that, “it is our first duty to decide the most important question, viz. which is the older of all these documents, whether [... *The Messiah Sutra*] is the oldest of all the Nestorian documents yet found in China, or whether [... *On One God* is] older than [... *The Messiah Sutra*].”⁷⁵

Despite these misgivings, even before P.Y. Saeki had written a word about it, this source had already been claimed to be the oldest text. In 1930, even though he had not studied the latter source because of the inaccessibility of the original manuscript, A.C. Moule briefly proclaimed that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* “are apparently earlier” than the other eighth-century Christian texts.⁷⁶ The “slight indication of early date” of *The Messiah Sutra*, A.C. Moule writes, is that the cross is called “a ‘tree’” (木) and “the ‘figure of ten’” (十字) was not “adopted” until the end of the eighth century.⁷⁷

Furthermore, the date 635-638 seems to have been in circulation in the literature before 1937. As far as I know, it first appeared in the Introduction to P.Y. Saeki’s translation of *The*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1923:156.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1931:3. His punctuation is: 弥[彌]師訶向天下見也。向五蔭身。六百四十一年不過已。 It differs slightly from P.Y. Saeki’s version.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1926:126, 1931:1.

⁷⁵ P.Y. Saeki 1951:114-115.

⁷⁶ A.C. Moule 1930:58.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

Messiah Sutra published in 1932: “The date may be given as between A.D. 635-638.”⁷⁸ As no further explanations are given and this Introduction was added by the journal editor, Evan Morgan, from this distance it is hard to determine who made this claim, or on what grounds.

In spite of all these uncertainties, P.Y. Saeki did unquestionably carry out a comparative study supported by a historical survey to determine which of the texts predated the other. He compared *The Messiah Sutra* with *On One God* and made the leap of faith of linking the making of the sources to a historical event, Aluoben’s translation work. He gave three arguments for his assumption, namely: historical, philological or ideographical, and doctrinal observations. As each argument, P.Y. Saeki claims, provides independent proof that *The Messiah Sutra* was made before *On One God*, they will be reviewed one by one.

2.4.2.2.1 Historical observations

P.Y. Saeki initially placed greatest stress on the historical observations because the 781 Xi’an Stele documents the historical event that Aluoben translated some doctrines into Chinese between 635 and 638. This particular record, P.Y. Saeki claims,⁷⁹

will show to any one, that between 635 A.D. and 638 A.D., a certain kind of Christian literatures must have been translated or composed in Chinese either by Bishop Alopen himself or by his men with the assistance of native Chinese scholars, whilst the Emperor [Tang Taizong] himself investigated “the Way” or the outline of the Nestorian doctrine in his own Forbidden Apartments by reading these Nestorian literatures that might have been written by Bishop Alopen or his men.

On these grounds, P.Y. Saeki proceeds to associate this record with the making of *The Messiah Sutra*. He asserts that the contents of *The Messiah Sutra* “show that the document was written with special intention to give the Emperor the outline or general sketch of the whole Christian Teaching.”⁸⁰ One of the examples he chose to make his point is the Ten Vows mentioned above. He argues that the Chinese version of the Ten Vows reveals an integration of both Chinese culture (Emperor and ancestor worship) and Christian teachings, in order “to solicit the Imperial favour for the Nestorian Mission just arrived at the Capital”.⁸¹

⁷⁸ P.Y. Saeki 1932:31.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

With this idea in mind, P.Y. Saeki compares the contents of *The Messiah Sutra* with those of *On One God*:⁸²

any one who went through [... *The Messiah Sutra*], as we have it, cannot but be convinced that [... *The Messiah Sutra*] contains a surprisingly complete outline of the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, and that it must have been presented to some one in order to teach the outline of Christianity, and that, therefore, it must have preceded [... *On One God*] in the order of reading, since the latter contain more advanced Nestorian doctrines than the former.

In the wake of these observations, P.Y. Saeki alleges that “we may rightly presume that [... *The Messiah Sutra*] must really be the very first Nestorian Sutra that was ever composed in the Imperial Library between 635 and 638 A.D.”⁸³

However, these historical observations do not prove that *The Messiah Sutra* was made by Aluoben sometime between 635 and 638. As suggested in the Introduction to this dissertation, these observations do show us that *The Messiah Sutra* could have been composed by Aluoben. Nevertheless, the section on emperor and ancestor worship does not necessarily reveal that *The Messiah Sutra* was written with the special intention of impressing Tang Taizong specifically. As the emperor and ancestor worship were an uncontested part of Chinese tradition, it could have been written to impress any Chinese emperor.

Even more importantly, P.Y. Saeki’s argument does not demonstrate that *The Messiah Sutra* was composed earlier than *On One God*. The presumed existence of the “surprisingly complete outline of the fundamental doctrine of Christianity” contained in *The Messiah Sutra* is not enough to demonstrate that *The Messiah Sutra* was made to show “the outline of Christianity” to someone (Tang Taizong), who knew nothing about Christianity. It could have been created for and read by newly converted people or simply by younger members of the community, whose faith had to be nurtured and strengthened. As the purpose of the writing of this source is not known, too many possibilities are raised, none of which counts as a reliable historical argument. In addition, P.Y. Saeki did not present any textual evidence that could demonstrate that the doctrines outlined in *The Messiah Sutra* are less “advanced” than the doctrines set out in *On One God*. The determination that one doctrine is more advanced than the other is actually subjective. It is a value judgment that depends on the standards on which a particular scholar relies. Since P.Y. Saeki does not explicitly mention his criteria, it is impossible to evaluate whether or not his criteria were objective.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

2.4.2.2.2 Philological observations

Philological observations, P.Y. Saeki goes on to argue, “will also prove beyond any doubt that [... *The Messiah Sutra*] was written before” *On One God*.⁸⁴ In this part, he analyzes the translations of some words, including the phonetic transcriptions of key theological terms. In particular, he focuses on how “‘God,’ ‘Messiah,’ ‘Holy Spirit,’ ‘Jesus-Messiah’ and ‘Holy-Jesus’” are transcribed.⁸⁵ P.Y. Saeki writes: “Judging from these few decisive evidences taken out of many other proofs, it is natural that we should conclude that [... *The Messiah Sutra*] is older than [... *On One God* ...] written in 641 A.D.”⁸⁶

However, these observations rest on a problematic premise that translations (transcriptions) pass through an evolutionary process from ‘bad’ to ‘good’ and this process can therefore shed light on the order of precedence of the sources. Take for instance, P.Y. Saeki’s reliance on the translations of the word God to determine which source is earlier than the other. God is translated differently in the two sources. In *On One God*, God is *yishen* 一神, that literally means one god. In *The Messiah Sutra*, that is referred to as the Takakusu Document, God is *fo* 佛, a Chinese translation of Buddha. Discussing these different translations, P.Y. Saeki asks:⁸⁷

What does this mean? We believe that this fact clearly shows us that the Nestorian missionaries in 641 A.D., came to know for the first time that the Chinese word “I-shen” (一神) was a better word for the Nestorian document than the word “Buddha” [*fo* 佛] to designate God, whilst, on the other hand, it shows that the Nestorian missionaries at Ch’angan did not even know of the proper word for God when they composed the Takakusu Document.

In this quotation, P.Y. Saeki shows that he obviously believed that *yishen* was a “better” translation of God than *fo*. He is assuming that the Tang Christian translators had passed through an upwardly progressive process. His claim is that these translators had initially used a ‘bad’ term, *fo*, in *The Messiah Sutra*, and only later became aware that *yishen* was more appropriate. On these rather arbitrary grounds, P.Y. Saeki argues that *The Messiah Sutra* was made earlier than *On One God*.

This reasoning is based on a rigid mechanical understanding of translation. Recent work in Translation Studies has shown that translation is not merely a linguistic operation, the results

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

of which can be evaluated on a linguistic basis.⁸⁸ “Translations are not made in a vacuum. Translators function in a given culture at a given time.”⁸⁹ Translation is a complex dynamic process involving many factors (client, patronage, purpose and the like), all of which influence translators in one way or another. Consequently, certain expressions can be modified in order to suit the dominant ideology in a particular culture. A translated work, as Theo Hermans, André Lefevere and other scholars confirm, is a manipulated or rewritten product.⁹⁰ In other words, there is no ultimate standard by which to evaluate that one translation is necessarily better than any other.

Even if one sticks to the traditional view of translation and believes that a translation can be evaluated in terms of linguistic accuracy, to judge that one ancient translated term is more appropriate than the other is still very tricky. Not only should the today’s researcher be careful about the evaluation standard they rely on, but he or she must also be very familiar with the whole (ancient) translation process. At the point we come up against what has been so far an insurmountable problem, as little is still known about how Tang Christians translated their religious texts, as the processes they resorted to for matters like quality control, editing, selecting original texts and so forth are completely shrouded in mystery. In short, there is nothing that would allow us to suggest that Tang Christian translators “came to know for the first time” that the expression (*yishen*) would be “better than” the other term (*fo*).

2.4.2.2.3 Doctrinal observations

In the part on doctrinal observations, P.Y. Saeki revisits emperor and ancestor worship. He also pays attention to Christian precepts governing daily life and social morals, Christology and several other points. He notices that what is emphasized in one source is not stressed in the other:⁹¹

We find that no such social morals or Christian precepts for daily life [contained in *The Messiah Sutra*] were taught emphatically in [*On One God*]. But in [*On One God*] the doctrine of Monotheism was emphasized, together with the story of the Fall of Adam, besides the necessity of the vicarious death of the Messiah as well as His death on the Cross, and His Resurrection and Ascension, and even the story of the Pentecost were stated. No such statements were found in [... *The Messiah Sutra*].

⁸⁸ Out of this new idea emerged a new discipline, Translation Studies. Since the 1960s, many scholars have no longer seen translation as a target text based on a source text. They have abandoned the rigid traditional understanding and have begun to approach translation from a pluralist point of view. For more details, see Anthony Pym (2016), Jeremy Munday (2016), Edwin Gentzler (2001), Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (1998), J.C. Catford (1965) and Eugene Nida (1964).

⁸⁹ André Lefevere 1992a:14.

⁹⁰ Theo Hermans 2014; André Lefevere 1992b.

⁹¹ P.Y. Saeki 1951:123.

On these grounds, P.Y. Saeki alleges:⁹²

We, therefore, can not imagine that the comparatively difficult theological documents owned by Mr. Tomeoka [*On One God*] were written before the Takakusu Document [*The Messiah Sutra*] which gives the outline and general view of Christian precepts for daily life.

However, these doctrinal observations are ill-considered. The most striking difficulty is that any decision about which doctrine is more advanced than another, as critiqued in the above, is a value judgment. Secondly, these observations are not really connected to the question of which source is older than the other. They simply demonstrate the given fact that what is found in one source is not necessarily found in another. If any two texts deal with different topics, obviously their contents should not be the same. Similarly, the substance of *The Messiah Sutra* need not be found in *On One God* or vice-versa. They are two distinct texts, not two versions of one source. Therefore, P.Y. Saeki's observations simply list the given textual variations. They belong to a 'compare and contrast' study that examines the differences between *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* and have nothing to do with the time of the making of the two sources.

2.5 Conclusion

This short discussion allows two conclusions to be drawn about *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. The first is that the two documents are not early-twentieth-century re-copies of (lost) ancient Christian sources but genuine old religious documents. Despite their poor archeological documentation, difficult contents and the inaccessibility of the original manuscripts, their layout, binding, paper-treatment and other codicological features confirm that they are two normal Dunhuang manuscripts. They also can be matched with Christian scriptures. *The Messiah Sutra* recounts the Gospel stories. *On One God* is devoted to clarifying one particular theological theme, One God. Furthermore, the forgery theory is not supported by any evidence and is hence open to serious criticism. The arguments, in point of fact, are plagued by unfounded premises, of which the most obvious and important one is that the two sources were made by Aluoben and submitted to Tang Taizong in the 640s. As will be demonstrated by more findings of this research, the forgery theory must be abandoned.

The other conclusion concerns the chronology of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. The two sources are not dated. The dates they bear were proposed in the early twentieth century

⁹² *Ibid.*, 123-124.

when they were first examined by scholars. For the date of *On One God*, 641, none of the so-called evidence is conclusive. The phrase, a place to the east of Persia, can at best only be taken as an indication of where the manuscript was made. It has nothing to do with the time of making the source. The derogatory association of the Liao people with swine was used much earlier than Tang China and was not invented in the aftermath of the Tang invasion of the Liao area. Therefore its use in *On One God* was customary. The most important indication, the Chinese numeral 641, remains a problem that is still difficult to solve. Even P.Y. Saeki's version of the Chinese is not intelligible. It is hard to say with any certainty whether it indicates the year 641 or a time-span of 641 years. Should it be a time-span, there is nothing to suggest that the point of reference of the calculation is the very year in which the Messiah (Jesus Christ) was born.

Compared to that of *On One God*, the date of *The Messiah Sutra*, 635-638, is even more uncertain. Firstly, its conventional date was proposed on the basis of the unconfirmed date of *On One God*. Secondly, none of P.Y. Saeki's three arguments actually leads to the conclusion that *The Messiah Sutra* is older than *On One God*. His doctrinal and philological observations consist of a long list of textual differences; the historical aspect merely establishes possibility. In essence, none of these arguments touches upon the question of which source is older than the other.

Furthermore, P.Y. Saeki also tried to rely on Haneda Toru's authority to date the two sources, but in doing so he misinterprets Haneda Toru. Haneda Toru himself was not confident about the chronology of the two texts. On the one hand, he clearly knew that the two sources were written in the same hand. On the other hand, he refused to assign the date of *On One God* (641) to *The Messiah Sutra*, asserting albeit briefly that *The Messiah Sutra* must have been made before the mid-eighth century.

In a nutshell, the common arguments about the timeline of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* present difficulties. Their chronology, the 640s, is problematic. In the next chapter, we shall examine the empirical findings that refute this dating.

Chapter 3 A refutation of the conventional chronology

Alas, ancient books are hard to read! (甚矣古書之難讀也！)

— Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1880-1971)¹

Mount Chang was renamed Mount Zhen after the enthronement of [Tang Muzong] in the fifteenth year [of the Yuanhe reign, 820]. ([唐穆宗元和]十五年即位，改嘗岳為鎮岳。)

— Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (962-1025)²

Mount Heng was renamed Mount Zhen [after the enthronement of Tang Muzong in the fifteenth year of the Yuanhe reign]. ([唐穆宗元和十五年即位] 改恒岳為鎮岳。)

— Liu Xu 劉煦 (888-947)³

The modern historian Chen Yuan uttered the exclamation above when he, by complex deductions relating to Chinese imperial name taboos, finally understood that Wang Qinruo's record was not wrong after all but what he had read should stand. In Tang China there was no holy mountain called Mount Chang. As Liu Xu demonstrates it was Mount Heng that was renamed Mount Zhen in 820 because *heng* was the given name of the new emperor and therefore had to be avoided. In 1013, when Wang Qinruo quoted this historical record and submitted his work to the throne, *heng* again had to be tabooed, but this time because it was the name of Emperor Song Zhenzong. Acquiescing in the practice, Wang Qinruo replaced *heng* with a synonym, *chang* 常. In the late-seventeenth century, however, *chang* was contained in Emperor Ming Guangzong's name, Changluo 常洛, and had to be tabooed. The upshot was that the re-publisher of Wang Qinruo's work substituted *chang* 常 with a homonym, *chang* 嘗, that was what Chen Yuan read.

This laborious chain of deduction shows that the name taboo practice was a demanding, enduring Chinese tradition and intimates that a study of the avoidance of emperors' names can shed light on the time of the production of a manuscript. This chapter will rely on this practice in order to examine whether it is at all possible that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were produced in the first period of the Tang church. Since it has been claimed that Aluoben composed the two texts and discussed them with Tang Taizong around the 640s, this

¹ Chen Yuan 陳垣 1958:71. Chen Yuan's work, *Shihui juli* 史諱舉例, was first published in 1928. This dissertation refers to the version edited in 1958.

² Cited from Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1958:70).

³ Liu Xu 劉煦 945/1975:476.

chapter investigates whether and, if so, how Aluoben avoided *shimin* 世民, the name of his great patron.

Before any discussion begins, it is necessary to introduce the Chinese taboo tradition. This introduction will be followed by a discussion of the ways in which scribes avoided Tang Taizong's name. On the basis of the results of these discussions, the chapter will analyze *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, and compare their taboo examples with a large corpus of stones carved between 618 and 663. These findings show that although the two Christian sources are authentic ancient manuscripts, they were not made in the 640s. The chapter also goes on to suggest that the two Christian manuscripts must have been produced in a much later period.

3.1 Relying on the name taboo practice to date sources

Throughout Chinese history, an impressive number of special decrees and governmental edicts were issued to admonish people to observe the name taboo practice in both writing and speaking. Consequently in the course of time, many texts, essays and manuscripts were altered, modified and redacted, leaving traceable clues to the time at which the sources were produced.

3.1.1 A historical overview of the name taboo practice

The name taboo practice is probably as old as Chinese civilization itself. Sources indicate that it might have been established and widely embraced more than 3,000 years ago. *The Zuozhuan* 左傳, one of the earliest Chinese historical sources, notes that “[The Zhou people’s] names should be tabooed after death.” ([周人]名終將諱之)⁴

Observance of this custom was more stringently enforced after Qin Shihuang 秦始皇 declared himself the first emperor of China in 221 BCE. Later it became standard practice at the imperial courts that frequently issued special decrees to command people to avoid the emperors' names. “According to the practice in the Han dynasty,” Xing Zicai 邢子才 notes in the sixth century, “when the Son of Heaven ascended the throne, his name became known

⁴ For a more complete quotation, see Poitr Adamek (2015:87). For more details about the emergence of this practice, see also Wang Xinhua 王新華 (2007:2-6), and Wang Jian 王建 (2002:1).

under Heaven and was avoided by all people.”漢法，天子登位，布名於天下，四海之內，無不咸避。⁵

In the period from the seventh to the thirteenth century, the taboo practice seems to have reached its “culmination”.⁶ In Tang China, for instance, the practice was codified. The first Chinese penal code, *The Tanglü shuyi* 唐律疏議, stipulates:⁷

Any violation of the ancestral temple name taboos in the above-mentioned petitions, and submitted to the Emperor, is punishable by eighty blows with a rod. For violations caused by slips of the tongue and in other documents, the punishment is fifty blows with a stick. 諸上書若奏事，誤犯宗廟諱者，杖八十；口誤及餘文書誤犯者，笞五十。

Although the name taboo practice grew less exaggerated in later periods, by and large violations were not tolerated. Transgressors were often humiliated, tortured and could even be decapitated. In 1777, for instance, Wang Xihou 王錫侯 paid dearly for failing to observe respect due to emperors’ names in his dictionary. He and several of his family members were beheaded.⁸ As scholars have observed, the taboo tradition persisted until the last emperor, Pu Yi 溥儀, abdicated the throne in 1912, and this tradition penetrated into all layers of Chinese culture.⁹

3.1.2 Using the taboos to date sources

For today’s scholars, the name taboo can be very useful. Relying on this practice, codicologists can determine a source’s edition and verify its authenticity, historians are able to solve some mysteries and philologists have a way to study ancient pronunciations. The taboo examples are particularly helpful as one of the most common methods to date manuscripts because of their adherence to unique characteristics.¹⁰

First, the most important fact about this practice is that the name taboo was a nationwide injunction against the use of emperors’ (personal) names. It was promulgated in decrees, regulations and codes. Examples of it are innumerable. Most are clear cut and are not subject to dispute. Even the more difficult ones are often readily discernible and can be cross-checked with other sources.

⁵ Wei Zheng 魏徵 636/1973:187.

⁶ Piotr Adamek 2015:139.

⁷ Zhangsun Wuji 長孫無忌 653/1983:200.

⁸ Cf. Piotr Adamek (2015:1-2).

⁹ For the impacts, see Piotr Adamek (2015), Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010), and Wang Jia 王建 (2002).

¹⁰ For the usefulness of the name taboo, see Piotr Adamek (2015:227-247).

The second characteristic is that the taboo of a name had a temporal demarcation. Although the name might have been avoided when the emperor was still the heir-apparent, a wider prohibition was usually enforced after he ascended the throne.¹¹ This remained in force for seven generations, after which the emperor's name was removed to the Hall of the Distant Ancestors. However, names of very strong emperors, especially the early founders, could continue to be avoided throughout the dynasty. Nevertheless, the taboos imposed in a former dynasty were not observed in a new dynasty. Generally speaking, but not without exception, in texts that contained older taboos names were restored to their original status and, of course, modified to accommodate the new names to be avoided. Although it was an extremely rare occurrence, the taboo on Tang Taizong's name, as demonstrated in Section 3.5, continued to be avoided for some time, even after the Tang collapse.¹²

The third feature is the broad scope of the implementation of the taboo system that meant the writing of the names of imperial ancestors and the names of people who were recognized as ancestors by the emperors was also discouraged. Probably because of the all-pervading influence of ancestor worship, these names were tabooed as strictly as those of ruling emperors, despite the fact the bearers of these names had died long before the dynasty was established. As will be demonstrated, the character *hu* 虎 was widely avoided in Tang China because it was the given name of Li Hu 李虎 (d. 551), the great-grandfather of Tang Taizong. These taboos are also helpful when examining sources, because the taboo was always officially enacted by the court by the proclamation of edicts or orders that are dated or are clearly documented.

The fourth characteristic is that the name taboo did not mean that the emperors' names or their corresponding characters could never be used. This practice did actually allow scribes to employ these characters, but, whenever they encountered them, scribes were supposed to adopt technical measures in order not to offend the name-bearers. Accordingly, in the course of time the Chinese people developed a full package of methods that enabled them to use these names without running the risk of being punished. Alongside the method observed at the opening of this chapter (that is: a name could be replaced by another character or a synonym), after having written the emperor's name, some authors covered it with a slip of yellow paper. Moreover, when encountering the name, certain people did not commit it to

¹¹ It seems that Chinese avoided mentioning crown princes' names from the third and fourth centuries. Nevertheless, this avoidance might have been observed by only a small group of people, presumably court officials. For more details, see Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:73) and Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1958:136).

¹² For more details, see Piotr Adamek (2015:271) and Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1958:79-80).

paper at all but left the space blank. Constrictions imposed by space mean that these taboo methods cannot be introduced one by one with illustrations of each of them. However, four techniques of tabooing Tang Taizong's names are discussed at great length below because they are important to the dating of our manuscripts.¹³

Given the pervasiveness of the practice, its temporal limitations, the special edicts and the different methods used, the name taboo lends itself splendidly to dating sources. As Imre Galambos points out, a rough and yet common rule of thumb in using taboos to date manuscripts is: "[W]henver such a [taboo] case is encountered, the document is generally assumed to date to the period between the reign of the ruler whose name is tabooed and the end of the same dynasty."¹⁴

3.2 The four methods of tabooing Tang Taizong's name, *shimin*

Tang Taizong's name, *shimin* 世民, composed of two characters, *shi* and *min*, was tabooed more rigorously than that of any other Chinese emperor. Among all the 2,504 examples collected throughout history, in Wang Jian's survey, 301 concern Tang Taizong's name.¹⁵ In Tang China, both *shi* and *min* were widely avoided by using one of four methods: omitting, replacing, *quebi* 缺筆 and *gaijian* 改件. This section argues that the latter two methods are two techniques that were newly introduced at different periods in Tang China and should not be mistaken for one method.

3.2.1 Examples tabooed using the two older methods, omitting and replacing

As suggested by their transparent meanings, omitting means that users simply did not write a name; replacing indicates that scribes chose to employ other characters, most of which happened to be synonymous with the name. Both methods are very old. The former had probably been in use since the Zhou dynasty; the latter since the third century BCE.¹⁶

Examples of avoiding Tang Taizong's name using these two methods are many. For instance, Tang authors also often did not write out *shi* or *min* contained in other people's names. A fifth-century man named Zhu Chaomin 竺超民 appears as Zhu Chao in Tang sources; Wang Shichong 王世充 (d. 621), a general who was defeated by Tang Taizong, was sometimes

¹³ There are more than a dozen methods. For comprehensive lists, see Piotr Adamek (2015:49-59), Wang Xinhua 王新華 (2007) and Wang Jiang 王建 (2002:305-310).

¹⁴ Imre Galambos 2012:109.

¹⁵ Wang Jian 王建 2002:285, 288.

¹⁶ Piotr Adamek 2012:49-50, 55, 86-87; Wang Xinhua 王新華 2007:170; Wang Jiang 王建 2002:306-307.

known as Wang Chong.¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, as Chen Yuan remarks, recourse to this method can easily lead to confusion, especially when people’s names are concerned.¹⁸

Likewise, *min* was often replaced with *ren* 人; *shi* with *dai* 代. The Xi’an Stele twice substitutes *shi* with *dai* to convey the birth of the Messiah: “*tong ren chu dai*” (同人出代) and “*fen shen chu dai*” (分身出代).¹⁹ In these two phrases, as scholars have pointed out, *chudai* is *chushi* that is still used by present-day Chinese to mean birth.²⁰ Probably because this method causes less confusion than the previous one and the taboo examples are largely decipherable, Tang scribes seem to have preferred this method. They replaced *shi* and *min* using a number of characters — see Table 3.1.²¹

Name	Replacement
<i>min</i> 民	<i>ren</i> 人, <i>baixing</i> 百姓, <i>meng</i> 萌, <i>mang</i> 氓, <i>shi</i> 士, <i>ren</i> 仁, <i>chen</i> 臣, <i>ding</i> 丁, <i>bu</i> 部, <i>buxia</i> 部下, <i>shi</i> 时, <i>tianxia</i> 天下
<i>shi</i> 世	<i>dai</i> 代, <i>shi</i> 时, <i>xi</i> 系, <i>si</i> 嗣, <i>su</i> 俗, <i>ye</i> 葉, <i>shi</i> 势, <i>zhu</i> 祖, <i>shi</i> 事, <i>tai</i> 太, <i>zhong</i> 中, <i>zheng</i> 政, <i>you</i> 又

Table 3.1 Replacement characters used to taboo Tang Taizong’s name, *shimin*

3.2.2 Examples tabooed using the new method, *quebi*

The *quebi* method was a popular taboo technique. It was “a superior way of maintaining the integrity of texts”.²² Both *shi* and *min* could be avoided on a large scale using this method. However, the first appearance of this method still has to be determined.

3.2.2.1 *Quebi* examples of *shi* and *min*

The *quebi* technique required the removal of some strokes from the character — usually the very last stroke. In simple words, scribes deliberately deviated from the orthodox orthography, writing a character in an ‘incorrect’ form. Various *quebi* forms of *shi* and *min* have been confirmed.

¹⁷ For a good list of these examples, see Wang Yankun 王彦坤 (2009:193-194, 240-242).

¹⁸ Chen Yuan 陳垣 1958:37-40.

¹⁹ Paul Pelliot 1996: Fig.2, Cols. 6, 26.

²⁰ For a brief discussion, see Xu Longfei (2004:128), Paul Pelliot (1996:204-205, note 39), and Lin Wushu 林悟殊 and Yin Xiaoping 殷小平 (2008:333).

²¹ This table is based on examples analyzed by Wang Yankun 王彦坤 (2009:194-200, 242-248).

²² Imre Galambos 2012:117.

Looking at the *quebi* examples of *shi*, three forms, 𠂔, 卅 and 卺, are clear.²³ The most common taboo form is 𠂔. In P.3371 alone, this form is used more than a dozen times, and all examples like 𠂔 are obvious.²⁴ *The Hua Xian Muzhi*, a Christian inscription dated 815 and introduced in Chapter 1, was also carved using this form, 𠂔 (c24w13).²⁵ In contrast, 卅 and 卺 are lesser known variants. The former, according to Piotr Adamek, was employed on the *Li Ji bei* 李勣碑 stele erected in 677.²⁶ The latter occurs in P.2536, a Dunhuang manuscript dated 663: 卺 (世).²⁷

Five taboo forms have been identified of the *quebi* examples of *min*. The most common four are: 𠂔 in S.799, 𠂔 in S.453, 𠂔 in S.800 and 𠂔 in P.2590.²⁸ The form, 氏, was less common. Xiang Zonglu (d. 1941) discovered that this form was used in a Tang annotation of *The Wenxuan* 文選, an anthology of Chinese literary works compiled by Xiao Tong 蕭統 (501-531).²⁹

3.2.2.2 The introduction of *quebi*

The precise time at which it was introduced is very hard to pin down. Most scholars accept the theory first proposed by Chen Yuan in 1928 and maintain that “must have begun in Tang Gaozong’s reign”. (當起於唐高宗之世)³⁰ This dissertation basically agrees with the prevailing

²³ For the sake of both argument and convenience, this paper uses the rescanned examples and the re-computerized forms. The condition of the sources, especially the manuscripts, varies widely. Many rescanned examples are too unclear. Importantly, as these illustrations are not the orthodox forms, the retyping is not easy and sometimes almost impossible.

²⁴ Cited from Michel Soymié (1990:404).

²⁵ To facilitate readers in finding these examples used on Tang stones, this dissertation follows the traditional Chinese writing habit and assigns a combination of letters and numerals to the samples. For instance, ‘c24w13’ means that the example is Word (Character) 13 in Column 24 on the *Hua Xian muzhi* tombstone. The example has been scanned from the original plate kindly sent to me by Mao Yangguang.

²⁶ Piotr Adamek 2015:145. This example was first analyzed by Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1958:6).

²⁷ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:139. All Dunhuang taboo examples used in this dissertation are cited from Dou Huaiyong, unless otherwise stated. I have re-examined each example by downloading manuscript images from International Dunhuang Project’s website, <http://idp.bl.uk/>. Note that Dou Huaiyong focuses on the taboos of Chinese emperors’ names between the fourth century and the early eleventh century. He exhausts all the dated Dunhuang manuscripts that number more than 600.

²⁸ The first three are quoted from Huang Zheng 黃征 (2005:276). For the last, see Michel Soymié (1990:404).

²⁹ Xiang Zonglu 向宗魯 1987:271. I do not have access to the original Tang version that Xiang Zonglu is studying.

³⁰ Chen Yuan 陳垣 1958:7. *Quebi*, other theories suggest, might have appeared in either the first or the fourth century, perhaps even the late sixth century. For instance, Dou Huaiyong has put forward the hypothesis that *quebi* might have already been used on a small scale in the Sui dynasty. However, none of these minor theories has yet been substantiated by clear examples. In fact, Dou Huaiyong basically concurs with Chen Yuan, and he writes candidly that we “lack convincing [Sui] evidence that might distinguish *quebi* taboos from popular variants.” (尚缺乏有力的[隋朝]證據將缺筆後的字形與俗字分開). Moreover, he has so far discovered no *quebi* taboos in Sui manuscripts — see below. For more details about these minor theories, see Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:129-139).

theory but nevertheless finds that we can backdate the appearance of the *quebi* method a little bit earlier.

On one hand, the prevailing theory seems strong. Lately, Piotr Adamek has also concluded that the *quebi* method “can be seen for the first time in the Tang period, during the ruling time of Gaozong”, whereas other earlier alleged cases “cannot be confirmed” owing to “many different writing styles [variants]”.³¹ He goes on to elaborate:³²

For example in the inscription of “Zengtai shikong xuangongbei” 贈泰師孔宣公碑 (Stone Stele Presented to the Greatest Teacher Confucius) from 666, the character *min* 泯 is written as *zhi* 泚. The case is regarded as the first known example of the method of a missing stroke. Similar instances can also be found in the “Zhining bei” 志寧碑 (Stone Stele of Zhining, 666) — *shi* 世 is written as *sa* 卅 in the expression *shiwu* 世武, and on the “Li He bei” 李賀碑 (Stone Stele of Li He) (677) — there is the *sa* 卅 character put in place of *shi* 世 in the name of Wang Shichong 王世充.

On the other hand, these putative earliest examples are not the first occurrences of *quebi*. There are pre-666 examples and they are not only unequivocal but also sizeable. Dou Huaiyong has already discovered a number of *quebi* examples from Tang Gaozong’s reign but a few years prior to 666. His earliest examples are found in manuscript P.2536, dated 663. In this source, on multiple occasions *bing* 丙, *min* 民, *shi* 世 and *zhi* 治 are deprived of their last strokes. For an illustration, see the last above-mentioned *quebi* example of *shi*. More *quebi* examples used in Tang Gaozong’s rule are discussed in Chapter 4.

Furthermore, I have also found examples that were used in Tang Taizong’s reign. The earliest occurrences I have discovered are 𪔐 and 𪔑. They bear the date 648, occurring in *The Shanjianlü* 善見律, a Tang Buddhist manuscript famous for its exquisite calligraphy (23 centimeters x 457 centimeters). Although this source scarcely rates a mention from many taboo experts, there are five good reasons that demonstrate these two occurrences are *quebi* taboos of *hu* 虎 (虓), the name of Li Hu, that have been deprived of the last vertical stroke.

The first affirmative reason is that *The Shanjianlü* is a genuine manuscript. As shown below, information about how it came to be made is indisputable. The manuscript was produced by the Tang court and it might have even been used by Emperor Tang Taizong himself. Moreover, as attested by private seals and historical notes, this manuscript has been the property of

³¹ Piotr Adamek 2015:54, 144.

³² Piotr Adamek 2015:145. The first source should be transcribed as *Zeng taishi kongxuangong bei*. The full title of the second stone is *Yu Zhining bei* 于志寧碑. The correct title of the last stele should be *Li Ji bei* 李勣碑.

members of the Chinese elite throughout history. For some time it was even kept in the Imperial Library and was examined by several emperors of different dynasties. Currently, it is housed at the Palace Museum 故宮博物院 in Beijing.³³

The second reason that confirms our statement is that the context reveals that the two examples are the character *hu* 虎. The first example occurs in the phrase “*hu lang shizi*” (虎狼師[獅]子); the second example in the phrase “*shanhu hupo jin yin*” (珊瑚[琥]珀金銀).³⁴ As these two phrases consist only of ordinary nouns, there is no any other way to read them other than in the interpretation below. The first phrase refers to three ferocious beasts, *hu* (虎) for tiger, *lang* for wolf and *shizi* for lion; the second phrase lists four expensive substances, namely: *shanhu* coral, *hupo* (琥[琥]珀) amber, *jin* gold and *yin* silver.

The third reason that backs our argument is the very fact that *The Shanjianlü* was sanctioned by the Tang court suggests that its production was subject to the most stringent quality control. The colophon states that the manuscript was written on seven pieces of paper by a professional scribe, Guo Quan 國詮, on “the tenth day of the twelfth month in the twenty-second year of the Zhenguan reign” (貞觀廿二年十二月十日, December 29, 648).³⁵ The text was then proofread not once, but twice. On the first occasion this work was done by Dao Yi 道嶷 and the second by Fa Lun 法倫, both monks but from two different Buddhist monasteries. After editing, these loose pieces were bound by a professional binder called Fu Wenkai 輔文開. Crucially, each procedure seems to have been overseen by government representatives. As stated in the colophon, the whole process was supervised by four officials: Ma Renyi 馬仁義, Zhao Mu 趙模, Lu Zhengchen 盧爭臣 and Wei Dan 蔚丹; and the whole project was under the direction of Yan Liben 閻立本, a top court official who was also a well-known calligrapher and painter. Given such rigorous quality control, the making of this manuscript was unquestionably a serious court matter and the manuscript was probably intended to be read by Emperor Tang Taizong. In short, this Buddhist source was produced to the highest possible standards, that would certainly have faithfully observed the name taboo practice.

The fourth reason to verify our assertion is based on the fact that Chinese historical accounts record that *hu* should be avoided because the name-bearer, Li Hu, was posthumously

³³ For more information, visit the official website <http://www.dpm.org.cn/collection/handwriting/231479.html>.

³⁴ Sun Baowen 孫寶文 2012:6, 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31. Images of this manuscript can be easily found on the Internet.

elevated to emperor. *The Tanghuiyao* records that one month after he seized the throne, Li Yuan created Li Hu “Jing Emperor” (景皇帝) and placed his name tablet in the ancestral temple where it could be venerated.³⁶ In fact, throughout the Tang dynasty, *hu* remained widely tabooed. It was often replaced by *wu* 武 — the phrase *hupi* 虎皮, the official position *huben* 虎賁 and the geographical name *hulao* 虎牢 were changed to *wupi* 武皮, *wuben* 武賁 and *wulao* 武牢 respectively.³⁷ As Wang Jian points out, *hu* was one of the most frequently tabooed Tang characters, ranking second only to Tang Taizong’s own name.³⁸

Finally, forms similar to these two examples have been identified as *quebi* taboos of *hu*. 虎 found by Michel Soyumié in manuscript P.2530 that bears the date 660, for instance, is exactly the same as our first example.³⁹ In fact, Dunhuang manuscripts yield more examples that are exactly the same as our two specimens. In manuscript P.2457 alone, Dou Huaiyong has recognized these two forms: 虜 and 虜. Pertinently these two forms do not differ at all from our first and second examples. Manuscript P.2457 is a religious source composed by Daoists in the name of Tang Xuanzong in the “*Kaiyuan niansan nian*.” (開元廿三年, 735)⁴⁰

All of the reasons given clearly indicate that the examples used in *The Shanjianlü* are *quebi* taboos. They were deliberately written in this form by the scribe to deviate from the orthodox orthography so as not to offend the name-bearer Li Hu. In short, the *quebi* method was not first used in Tang Gaozong’s reign as it had already been employed in Tang Taizong’s reign. As no other earlier examples can be confirmed, at this stage of research we can claim that *quebi* could very well have been introduced during Tang Taizong’s reign or at a given time between 626 and 648.

3.2.3 Complex characters tabooed using the new method, *gaijian*

Before Dou Huaiyong first observed the *gaijian* method in 2007 and consequently reiterated that we should distinguish *gaijian* from *quebi* in 2010, all the *gaijian* taboos were taken to be examples of *quebi*.⁴¹ To the best of my knowledge, Dou Huaiyong still remains the only

³⁶ Wang Pu 王溥 961/1955:1. Li Yuan elevated four generations of his ancestors in total.

³⁷ For more examples, see Piotr Adamek (2015:52, 236, 238, 273), Wang Jian 王建 (2011:199-203), and Wang Yankun 王彥坤 (2009:103-117).

³⁸ Wang Jian 王建 2002:288.

³⁹ Michel Soyumié 1990:404.

⁴⁰ This date is given in the colophon and is cited from Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2007:97).

⁴¹ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:156-171, 2007:218-226.

scholar to have made this distinction.⁴² I agree with Dou Huaiyong and reiterate that the first appearance of the *gaijian* method can be traced back precisely to the year 658. On the basis of his study, I shall clarify some of the points he raises and offer the first reconstructed picture of this complicated method.

3.2.3.1 The term *gaijian*

The term *gaijian* is derived from *gaixing* 改形 that was coined by Dou Huaiyong to categorize a large portion of presumed *quebi* examples analyzed by mainstream scholars. Dou Huaiyong argues that a *quebi* was confined only to the actual names of the emperors, whereas *gaijian* (*gaixing*) was applied to the complex characters of which these names consist. For instance, *ye* 葉 is a complex character composed of three elements. The top element is *ao* 艹 and the lower element is *mu* 木; arranged between these two elements is *shi* 世, the first character of Tang Taizong's name. *Hun* 昏 is also a complex character. It has two elements. The top is *min* 民, the second character of Tang Taizong's name; the lower *ri* 日. Obviously, these complex characters were not actual royal names and they differ fundamentally from the individual characters contained in the emperors' name — in this case, *shi* and *min*. Nevertheless, these complex characters were also avoided from the advent of the Tang dynasty in China.

Technically speaking, the term *gaixing* is less precise than the phrase *gaijian*. In the writing of Chinese characters, *xing* 形 means form, shape and appearance, and *jian* 件 stands for component, part and element. Therefore, *gaijian* encapsulates the uniqueness of avoiding complex characters more accurately than does *gaixing*. In a nutshell, strictly speaking any taboo example entails changes in the original form of a particular character. That is to say, any name taboo, regardless of a specific method, can be labeled a *gaixing* example. Therefore, this paper prefers *gaijian* to *gaixing*.

3.2.3.2 The introduction of *gaijian*

As far as the sources are concerned, *gaijian* appeared in 658. The initial appearance of this method is documented and can also be substantiated from other sources. Nevertheless, the first promulgation is actually attested in two sources. The first one is a court order preserved in *The Jiutangshu*.⁴³

⁴² For instance, Piotr Adamek (2015) and Imre Galambos (2012) do not recognize this method.

⁴³ Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:77. See also Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:157) and Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1958:7).

[Tang Gaozong] changed “*hun*” and “*ye*” on the sixteenth day [of the twelfth month in the second year of the Xianqing reign]. [唐高宗顯慶二年十二月] 庚午，改 “昏” “葉” 字。

Admittedly, this order is succinct, and it does not explain how these two characters, *hun* and *ye*, should be avoided. However, it is clear cut and unambiguous. It documents indisputably that Tang Gaozong promulgated the *gaijian* method and ordered that *hun* and *ye* be tabooed on January 25, 658.

The second source is *The Sanzang shengjiaoxu ji* 三藏聖教序記 that happens to employ *hun* and *ye*. *The Sanzang shengjiaoxu ji* is not a common source. It is a stele that was composed to extol the virtues of Xuanzang 玄奘, a Chinese monk who journeyed overland to India (629-645) and translated Sanskrit Buddhist texts into Chinese.⁴⁴ The first part of this text was composed by Tang Taizong in 648; the second part was added shortly afterwards by his successor, Tang Gaozong. The whole text was then written down by Wang Hangman 王行滿, a famous calligrapher. The stele was subsequently carved by Sheng Daoyuan 沈道元 and erected in Yanshi 偃師, Xuanzang’s birthplace.

In view of this official attribution of the text, therefore, it would have been surprising had this stone not embraced the tradition and avoided *hun* and *ye*. However, the opposite is true. The stone does not taboo the use of either of these two characters. As Dou Huaiyong has observed, *ye* is written in its orthodox form.⁴⁵ I have re-examined the rubbing and have found that *hun* was also chiseled in its normal orthography. This rescanned example, , although not as clear as it might be, is still legible.⁴⁶ There is no doubt that it is not a taboo form.

The reason that this official source used the orthodox orthographies is not far to seek. The answer lies in the time that the stone was erected, namely: on “the fifteenth day [of the twelfth month ...] in the second year of the Xianqing reign.” (顯慶二年[十二月.....]十五日, January 24, 658)⁴⁷ That is to say, its erection took place precisely one day before Tang

⁴⁴ After returning to Tang China, Xuanzang dictated an account of his journey to his disciple, Bianji 辯機. His account, *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* 大唐西域記, has been translated into English by Li Rongxi (1996). Some of his other works will be analyzed in Chapter 6.

⁴⁵ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:157.

⁴⁶ Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京圖書館金石組 1997a:57. This example is carved on the lower part of Column 13. This stone has been badly damaged and a fair part of the rubbing is illegible.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* The date is in the last column. Cogently, *ye* and *hun* were also not tabooed in another inscription of the same text composed in 652 by Chu Suiliang 褚遂良, a famous calligrapher. For more details about this earlier stone, see Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1958:7).

Gaozong ordered that *ye* and *hun* be avoided. On that particular day, there was still no requirement to taboo any complex characters.

This promulgation is also confirmed by Dunhuang manuscripts and Tang engraved stones. Dou Huaiyong's study has demonstrated that none of the dated manuscripts ever avoided any complex characters before 658. The earliest *gaijian* taboo that Dou Huaiyong has found occurs in a Buddhist manuscript, *Ganbo* 028. This manuscript bears the date "the twenty-third day of the sixth month in the third year of the Xianqing reign" (顯慶三年六月廿三日, July 28th, 658) — for the illustration, see below.⁴⁸ Turning to the engraved Tang tombstones, none of the following 500 inscriptions carved before the middle of the seventh century ever employed the *gaijian* method before 658. As will be discussed in Section 3.4, the first example of the avoidance of these complex characters is found on a tombstone, [Zhang] *Henggui zhi* [張]恒貴誌. According to the inscription, *Zhang Henggui* was buried in October 658 (顯慶三年八月), just a few months after Tang Gaozong's order was promulgated.

3.2.3.3 Reconstructing the *gaijian* method

Although the *gaijian* method is still only scantily documented, a search of Dunhuang manuscripts and Tang carved stones unlocks many more details that demonstrate that Tang China avoided a host of complex characters. In fact, the examples are so numerous we are able to reconstruct a fairly detailed picture of this new technique. As the examples collected from the Tang steles and stones will be discussed in Section 3.4, this section will be confined to the examples found in Dunhuang manuscripts.⁴⁹

Generally speaking, the element *shi* was modified in three ways. In the most conspicuous *shi* was changed into 甘. For example, *xie* 洩 was transformed into 洩 (P.2617) and *die* 牒 into 牒 (P.2617). Besides this, *shi* could also be replaced by 曳. For example, *xie* 洩 was written as 洩 (S.5731, P.2371), *yi* 榘 as 榘 (P.2528), *ye* 拙 as 拽 (P.3906v, S.5431) and *yi* 咄 as 咄 (S.617). Meanwhile, the element *shi* could also be written as 云 that often appears as 云 in

⁴⁸ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2007:74. This date occurs in the colophon. *Ganbo* stands for Gansusheng bowuguan 甘肅省博物館, a provincial museum in China.

⁴⁹ For more occurrences, see Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:157-171, 183-218, 226-243).

handwritten works.⁵⁰ For example, *die* 諫 was modified into 諫 (S.388), *die* 蹀 into 蹀 (P.2528) and *die* 蝶 into 蝶 (S.617, P.3054).

The element *min* 民 was likewise modified in three ways. The most common one was its transformation into 氏. Therefore *min* 泯 was written as 泯 (*Ganbo* 028). Meanwhile, the element *min* was also changed into “氏.”⁵¹ For example, the taboo form of *hun* 昏 was 昏 (P.2717). Occasionally, the element *min* could be written as 𠂔 — the example being 𠂔, that is *min* 泯. Dou Huaiyong found it in P.2475, a Taoist text written in 714.⁵²

Several interesting facts that have not been observed anywhere else can be gleaned from the list. Firstly, during the Tang dynasty, people seem to have employed these fashions interchangeably, showing no special inclination to abide by any one particular fashion. Many complex characters were in fact written in more than one way. For example, *ye* 葉 was written in two ways: 葉 (S.2999, P.3742) and 葉 (P.3233, P.2016). The same applies to *die* 揲: 揲 (P.2617) and 揲 (P.2602). Some complex characters were even tabooed in all the three ways. In addition to the two taboo forms mentioned above (*Ganbo* 028, P.2475), the character *min* 泯, for instance, was also avoided using the second fashion, “氏” (S.2832).⁵³

Secondly, the ways in which the elements *shi* and *min* were modified shed light on the interesting relationship between *gaijian* and *quebi*. Undoubtedly, *gaijian* and *quebi* are closely connected to each other and *gaijian* seems to have been invented on the basis of the existing use of *quebi*. The first method of avoiding the element *shi* mentioned above is one of the *quebi* forms of the individual character *shi*. All the three ways of tabooing the element *min* are precisely the same as the *quebi* forms of the individual character *min*. Despite these correspondences, *gaijian* and *quebi* are not one and the same method. They do differ from each other. The last two ways of discouraging the use of the element *shi* were completely new. To the best of my knowledge, these two fashions have not been spotted in the *quebi* examples of the individual character *shi*. Importantly, as to be demonstrated below, the

⁵⁰ 云 and 𠂔 seem to have been two different forms. Cf. Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:160-162). However they are probably one form written in two different styles. The former is in the standard style; the latter in the cursive style.

⁵¹ To computerize this example is difficult. This study cites the *quebi* example of *min* 民, found in S.799 and analyzed by Huang Zheng 黃征 (2005:366). The only difference between this example and the previous one is that this example is written with one dot in the right corner. Despite this difference, these two examples were used interchangeably. Cf. Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:162-163, 241). When examining the Tang tombstones, I do not distinguish these two different ways of modifying the element *min*.

⁵² Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:163.

⁵³ Huang Zheng 黃征 2005:277.

archaic forms of complex chracters can be revived and used to taboo Tang Taizong's name. In plain English, *gaijian* and *quebi* should be recognized as two different methods and the *gaijian* examples cannot be mixed up with the *quebi* examples or vice-versa.

In light of the above discussion and illustrations, we can extrapolate the following picture of the *gaijian* method.⁵⁴ Firstly, any complex character, as long as it was part of an emperor's name, could be avoided, even though Tang Gaozong actually ordered only two complex characters be tabooed. Secondly, the way to avoid the complex characters was to modify only the precise elements that happened to be the emperors' names. Other elements of the complex characters were left intact. Thirdly, *gaijian* was introduced on the basis of *quebi*, but it differs fundamentally from it. Fourthly, *gaijian* appeared no earlier than the year 658. Its specific commencement can be traced back to Tang Gaozong's order issued in 658.

3.3 The Messiah Sutra and On One God tabooed Tang Taizong's name inconsistently

In the framework of this overview of avoiding Tang Taizong's name, the implementation of the taboo practice in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* is not consistent. While they do use the taboo forms of Tang Taizong's name, both manuscripts still employ the orthodox orthographies, thereby violating the name taboo practice. This inconsistency, I argue, demolishes the traditional chronology that places these two sources in Tang Taizong's reign. As the findings will be spelt out in the Conclusion to this chapter, this section will document this inconsistency by presenting the non/taboo examples.

3.3.1 Non-taboo of Tang Taizong's name

The non-taboo of Tang Taizong's name is attested by two strands of conspicuous evidence. The first piece of evidence is that, although the scribe used the orthodox form of *shi* many times, he did not employ the character *min*. All forty-four occurrences of *shi* are clear and complete. All are in the form 世, that is still used as the only 'correct' orthography today. As demonstrated in Table 3.2, not a single example is deprived of a stroke. Not one occurrence of *shi* is a taboo.

Sources	<i>Shi</i>	Samples
<i>The Messiah Sutra</i>	1 x c7, 11, 12, 17, 18, 33, 46, 75, 104, 119, 122, 125, 136, 138, 147, 162, 163, 168.	c122w12 世, c138w6 世

⁵⁴ Here and there, Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:157-171, 183-218) has also tried to reconstruct *gaijian*.

<i>On One God</i>	1 x c207, 208, 209, 263, 265, 267, 285, 286, 294, 314, 316, 317, 333, 335, 339, 351, 352, 353, 357, 359, 361, 363, 364, 395; 2 x c348	c294w5  , c348w11 
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Table 3.2 Orthodox orthographies of *shi* in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

1x c7: one occurrence in Column 7.

The second piece of evidence is the complex character *min* 愍, that consists of the second character contained in Tang Taizong's name. This character occurs only once. The example,  (c115w5), is found in *The Messiah Sutra*.⁵⁵ As suggested above, *min* 愍 must have been tabooed after 658. More often than not, its left top element *min* 民 was changed into 氏 —  that was used in S.388, S.5319, P.2274, S.1048 and S.2278.⁵⁶ As our example is clear and neat, there is no room to doubt that it is an orthodox form.

Before moving on to discuss the undisputed taboos of Tang Taizong's name, two other observations need to be made about suspicious taboos. The first is concerned with the method omitting. This method, one might presume, was used because the key theological term *shizun* 世尊 is sometimes written without *shi*.⁵⁷ However, it is almost impossible to determine whether this non-usage of *shi* in this particular case was attributable to the name taboo practice or whether it can be blamed on the scribe's carelessness. As other occurrences of *shizun* do contain the character *shi*, the more likely scenario is that the scribe unintentionally omitted *shi*. This tendency toward scribal sloppiness will become more apparent when a growing number of examples can be quoted from the texts.

The second observation is about the method replacing. So far it seems to have been used only once in the phrase "*chunqiu yingdai*" (春秋迎代) that occurs in Col.162 of *On One God*.⁵⁸ The last character *dai*, according to Table 3.1, seems to be a replacement for *shi*. However, I am not aware of any literature that has discussed this particular phrase as a taboo form. Moreover, this phrase might even have been a customary expression. Wu Changxing seems to have pinpointed its ancient origin. He suggests that the usage comes from "*yushi chunqiu*

⁵⁵ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:397.

⁵⁶ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:240-241.

⁵⁷ In total, I have discovered six such instances. All occur in *On One God*. They can be found in Cols. 256, 266, 267, 269 (two occurrences) and 270. This non-occurrence of the character *shi*, as discussed in Chapter 2, has been used by the doubters as an indication of forgery.

⁵⁸ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:364.

gaijie, *sishi diedai*” (於是春秋改節，四時迭代), one verse from a famous Chinese essay, *Dongjingfu* 東京賦, written by Zhang Heng 張衡 in the second century.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, these two observations do not influence the analysis. Should these cases indeed be taboos, all they suggest is that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were made in or after Tang Taizong’s reign. At any rate, they do not necessarily attest that the two sources were produced around the 640s.

3.3.2 Taboo of Tang Taizong’s name

The taboo of Tang Taizong’s name is demonstrated by the fact that three complex characters are written in the taboo forms. Two characters contain the element *shi*: *die* 牒 and *qi* 棄. They are used in *On One God*. The third character is composed of the element *min* 民. It is the character listed in the Tang Gaozong’s famous order, *hun* 昏. It occurs in *The Messiah Sutra*. This section deals with them one by one.

3.3.2.1 *Die* 牒 was tabooed

Die 牒 consists of three elements. The left element is *pian* 片, the right top is *shi* 世, the first character contained in Tang Taizong’s name, and the lower right element is *mu* 木. It occurs only once,  (c287w4).⁶⁰

During the course of the twentieth century, this handwritten form was invariably transcribed by scholars as 片京.⁶¹ It barely raised any comment because the original Chinese context (Jesus’ body was shrouded in new cotton cloth) is pretty clear, and because the meaning of the text is not changed regardless of how this single character was transcribed.

Nevertheless, the research conducted in this new century has demonstrated that this transcription is a mistake. Nie Zhijun was the first to offer the suggestion that the handwritten example was one of “the popular forms” (俗字) used in many other Dunhuang manuscripts.⁶² Furthermore, he puts forward a succinct argument that the handwritten form was indeed a

⁵⁹ Wu Changxing 吳昶興 2015c:100, note 261.

⁶⁰ This example has been scanned from the version reprinted by Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:376).

⁶¹ For this transcription, see P.Y. Saeki (1951:59, Chinese texts), Weng Shaojun 翁紹軍 (1996:145), Jiang Wenhan 江文漢 (1982:87), Luo Xianglin 羅香林 (1966:203), and Gong Tianmin 龔天民 (1960:143).

⁶² Nie Zhijun 聶志軍 2010:123.

consequence of avoiding writing Tang Taizong's name, concluding that its orthodox form is “牒”.⁶³ So far, his reading has been accepted by Chinese scholars.⁶⁴

Although one could cross swords with Nie Zhijun about the demarcation between the popular forms and the orthodox orthographies, his conclusion is insightful and his explanation is inspiring. The modern transcription is not to be found in any dictionary, either Chinese or Japanese. Nor have I come across any ancient manuscript that ever used it. Most likely, it was invented by those scholars who first edited the Chinese texts in the early twentieth century, since when it has been taken for granted because the original manuscripts were not accessible.

In fact, the handwritten example in the Christian manuscript is very similar to many other Dunhuang handwritten forms that are recognized as the taboo form and are transcribed as 𪛗. For example, 𪛗 in S.203, discussed by Huang Zheng, and 𪛗 in P.2215 found by Dou Huaiyong.⁶⁵ It is almost identical to 𪛗 in P.2613 and many other subsequent examples collected from Tang tombstones.⁶⁶ In other words, this particular handwritten form used in *On One God* was the result of avoiding Tang Taizong's name by modifying the element *shi* that is contained in the complex character *die*.

3.3.2.2 Qi 棄 was tabooed

Qi 棄 can be divided into three elements. The top is 云; the middle *shi*; the lower *mu*. It also occurs once only in *On One God* in which case its middle element *shi* is removed, 𪛗 (c297w9).⁶⁷ The computerized form is 弃, of which the orthodox form is 棄.

So far this handwritten form has been a bone of contention; whether or not it is a taboo is still being debated by experts. Duan Yucai (d.1815) maintained that it is a taboo form. The reason, he explains, is that “the middle element of [棄] looks like 世 that was tabooed by the Tang people”. ([棄]中體似世/唐人諱世)⁶⁸ However, Su Peicheng points out that “弃 was the original ancient orthography of 棄.” (弃本來是棄的古文)⁶⁹ Therefore what Su Peicheng is

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Wang Lanping 王蘭平 2016a:208, 231, note 236; Wu Changxing 吳昶興 2015c:118, note 485.

⁶⁵ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:167; Huang Zheng 黃征 2005:87.

⁶⁶ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:101-102. This manuscript bears the date 873.

⁶⁷ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:376.

⁶⁸ Duan Yucai 段玉裁 1815/1981:158.

⁶⁹ Su Peicheng 蘇培成 2000:172.

suggesting is that the former had been used earlier and was replaced by the latter, but this is not enough grounds to claim that the former was not a taboo form. Lately, Dou Huaiyong has been exploring the middle ground. He comments: “It cannot be explicitly excluded that the ancient form ‘弃’ was being used more frequently [than 棄] in Tang China so as to avoid the character ‘世’ by employing the *gaixing* [*gaijian*] method.” (在唐代更多使用了古文字形‘弃’，這顯然不能排除因避唐‘世’字諱而改形[件]的可能。)⁷⁰

Although scholars have shown that 弃 was used long before Tang China, this research is inclined to accept that the form under discussion is a taboo. In fact, it seems that by acquiescing in Dou Huaiyong’s claim, it is possible to visualize a particular process: the older form 弃 became obsolete after the newer form 棄 was introduced; however, because of the taboo practice, the older form was revived in Tang China, apparently dislodging the newer form and this process is attested below.

3.3.2.3 Hun 昏 was tabooed

Hun 昏 is used three times. It is consistently written as 昏, whose top element, *min* 民, was changed into 氏/𡈼:  (c129w14),  (c132w10) and  (c133w5).⁷¹

This handwritten form is also not without its problems. Although mainstream scholars claim that it is a taboo, a few others assert that this form is not a taboo because it was used in pre-Tang China.⁷² Dou Huaiyong again adopts the middle ground. While claiming that it must be seen as a Tang taboo, he warns that one should tread very carefully when adducing it as a taboo case in the examination of sources because it was indeed used before Tang China.⁷³

As time presses, I have not traced the orthographic development of this character fully. However, none of the Tang stones examined below uses the taboo form 昏 before the year 658. Should 昏 be an old and obsolete form, it could still be suggested that the wide usage of this old form after 658 was the result of the wish to avoid Tang Taizong’s name.

3.4 Tang tombstones reveal that *gaijian* was introduced in 658

⁷⁰ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:162.

⁷¹ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:398-399.

⁷² For the mainstream claim, see Michel Soymié (1990:391-392), Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:241-243), and Chen Yuan 陳垣 (1958:52-53). For the historical usage of the two forms and their connections, see You Mingzhi 由明智 (2002).

⁷³ Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:241-243.

As some forms used in the Christian manuscripts are questionable, a quantitative survey was conducted so that they could be compared with the Tang inscriptions. The outcome shows that tombstone examples exhibit one identical pattern: not a single taboo form was used earlier than the year 658.

3.4.1 The survey design

The stone inscriptions examined in this chapter are contained in the first five volumes of *The Tangdai muzhiming huibian fukao* 唐代墓誌銘彙編附考, edited by Mao Hanguang who also transcribed and annotated them briefly. In total, these volumes contain 500 inscriptions that are numbered from 1 to 500. As each volume is arranged per 100 inscriptions; each book covers a different timespan: V.1: 619-646, V.2: 646-652, V.3: 652-656, V.4: 656-660 and V.5: 660-663.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, fifty-one of the stones have not been photographed, and fourteen rubbings are unclear. For this exercise, I have perused 435 pieces.⁷⁵

The stones have been found throughout China. Most were excavated between the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. The rubbings of a very small portion were made earlier, and a handful were discovered after World War II. The stones also vary in size and content (mainly a brief overview of the whole life of the deceased). A few contain almost 1,000 characters and appear to have been prepared for the Tang court and high-ranking officials. A number of stones are inscribed with just a few columns. The majority run to about 300 characters and are tombstones of lower-ranking officials and ordinary Tang people who are not documented in Chinese historical accounts. Therefore the taboo examples found on these stones could be a reflection of the fact that the taboo practice was commonly embraced by many strata in Tang society.

At this point it should be said that this research has not examined all the four complex characters found in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. Given time constrictions, it has focused on *die* 牒 and *hun* 昏. In order to extract yet more information, it also studied another character, *die* 諫. The reasons for running this additional check are twofold. Firstly,

⁷⁴ Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 1986a, 1986b, 1985a, 1985b, 1984). Mao Hanguang planned to examine all available Tang stones made in 618-907 but his project was interrupted. Between 1984 and 1994, he and his team read 1,800 rubbings and stopped in the year 727. In total, they published eighteen volumes.

⁷⁵ The plates that defy reproduction are Rubbings 3, 28, 32, 47, 48 and 52 in V.1; Rubbings 116, 154, 155, 156, 157, 164, 178, 183, 195 and 197 in V.2; Rubbings 208, 209, 211, 216, 250, 252, 258, 263, 281, 289 and 295 in V.3; Rubbings 302, 303, 308, 312, 316, 335, 357, 359, 367, 371, 378, 385, 399 and 400 in V.4; Rubbings 407, 423, 437, 450, 463, 467, 470, 480, 486 and 500 in V.5. The illegible inscriptions are Rubbings 6, 23, 58 and 79 in V.1; Rubbings 110 and 170 in V.2; Rubbings 227, 244, and 277 in V.3; Rubbings 336, 369, 370 and 382 in V.4; Rubbings 469 in V.5.

die 諫, as introduced in Section 3.2.3.3, was also tabooed because its right top element is *shi*. Secondly, Tang Chinese used *die* 諫 and *die* 牒 interchangeably to convey the meaning of a family record or lineage. On these stones, one often comes across phrases like *jiadie* 家牒/諫, *tudie* 圖牒/諫, *shidie* 史牒/諫, *pudie* 譜牒/諫 and *jiandie* 簡牒/諫. Therefore, the forms of 牒 can also give us clues about how the Chinese wrote 牒 at the time they were inscribed.

3.4.2 *Die* 牒 was not tabooed before 658

On these Tang stones, *die* 牒 occurs eighteen times. Examples are unevenly distributed throughout all five volumes. Only two forms are used. One is the orthodox form, 牒; the other is the taboo form, 𡇗. All occurrences are legible and undamaged.⁷⁶

As attested by Table 3.3, the non/usage of the two forms is clear cut. Before Tang Gaozong issued his edict in 658, all occurrences are of the orthodox form. After that edict, all examples are of the taboo form.

The first taboo instance occurs in the fourth volume, in Rubbing 352, [*Zhang*] *Henggui muzhi* [張]恒貴誌. This occurrence, 𡇗 (𡇗), is unmistakable. The right top element *shi* is irrefutably the typically taboo form, 𡇗, rather than the orthodox form, 世. According to the rubbing, Zhang Henggui never served in any official post. He died eleven months after the 658 edict was promulgated. The Chinese time is “the eighth month in the third year of the Xianqing reign.” (顯慶三年八月, 658)⁷⁷

Given these examples, it is reasonable to claim that the taboo form 𡇗 was first introduced in 658.

Volumes	Orthodox form 牒	Taboo form 𡇗
1 (619-646)	r10c5w3, r53c4w4, r70c4w10, r88c23w4, r90c3w6	--
2 (646-652)	r123c4w11, r131c2w2, r135c14w12, r196c3w7	--
3 (652-656)	r235c4w13, r299c3w25	--
4 (656-660)	r319c3w13, r320c6w9	r352c15w7
5 (660-663)	--	r432c3w9, r436c4w8, r444c4w13, r464c3w19

⁷⁶ The case of *die* 牒 (c4w15) in Rubbing 363 in Volume 4 is not studied. Its right top element *shi* is illegible. The stone is dated to *xianqing san nian* 顯慶三年 (658). However, this example does not impinge on our analysis of the use of the taboo form.

⁷⁷ Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 1986b:213 (transcription), 215 (rubbing).

Table 3.3 Orthographies of *die* 牒 in Tang stones (618-663)

3.4.3 *Hun* 昏 was not tabooed before 658

When we look at *hun* 昏 that occurs forty-nine times — see Table 3.4, we find that its usage is almost the same as that of *die* 牒. It is found in all five volumes. Yet only two forms were ever employed: the orthodox form, 昏, and the taboo form, 昏. All examples are legible.⁷⁸

The non/usage of these two forms is clearly demarcated by the year 658. Before 658, all occurrences exhibit the orthodox form. After 658, all examples display the taboo form.

The first occurrence of the taboo form is also found in the fourth volume. The example is



likewise clear: (c9w25). The rubbing is *Zhang Yi zhi* 張義誌. According to the text, Zhang Yi served in the Tang military in which enjoyed a modest career. He died at the age of seventy-four and was buried in Pingle 平樂, a town under the jurisdiction of Luoyang, on “the twenty-seventh day [...] of the seventh month in the fifth year during the Xianqing reign.” (顯慶四年七月 [.....] 廿七日, August 20, 659)⁷⁹ This means that this example was chiseled almost two years after Tang Gaozong ordered that particular complex characters should be tabooed.

On the basis of these findings, we are now ready to determine whether or not 昏 can be taken as a taboo form. As stated in Section 3.3.2.3, scholars have found that the form 昏 had been replaced by 昏 before the Tang dynasty was established in 618 and therefore they argue that this form is not a Tang taboo. Given the findings of this research, however, these contenders cannot give an adequate answer to one particular question: Why did Tang China suddenly abandon the orthodox form on a large scale and begin to use the older, archaic form? As demonstrated in Table 3.4, the orthodox form, not the archaic (taboo) form, was still being used in Tang China four months before Tang Gaozong’s order. The last occurrence of the orthodox form is dated to “the twenty-eighth day of [...] the eighth month [...] in the second

⁷⁸ Rubbing 360 in Volume 4 contains one unstudied example of *hun* (c15w1), whose top element *min* is damaged. Nevertheless, it is dated *xianqing san nian* 顯慶三年 (658), one year after Tang Gaozong’s edict. Whether or not it was a taboo case does not have any impact on our conclusion. Moreover, the combination ‘r60c22w7/8’ in Table 3.4 indicates that a rubbing (No. 60) contains two examples (Words 7 and 8) in one column (Column 22).

⁷⁹ Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 1986b:325-326 (transcription), 327 (rubbing).

year of the Xianqing reign.” (顯慶二年 [.....] 八月[.....] 廿八日, October 11, 657)⁸⁰ In hindsight, therefore, today we can deduce that 昏 was actually an archaic form of 昏. In the eyes of the Tang people, however, it seems that 昏 was accepted as a form of avoiding Tang Taizong’s name. Whatever the case may be, the above non/usage clearly suggests the following possible scenario: the orthodox form was discouraged because of the taboo tradition, and the obsolete form was revived and used as a form to circumvent the taboo by order of Tang Gaozong.

Given what has just been said, we cannot reject the argument that 昏 on these tombstones was a taboo form out of hand. Moreover, considering our observations of the other two characters, we are now in a much stronger position to assume that 昏 is actually a taboo case.

Volumes	Orthodox form 昏	Taboo form 昏
1 (619-646)	r9c9w4, r14c25w12, r16c15w16, r17c24w23, r44c19w4/5, r45c29w28, r60c22w7/8, r62c27w23, r65c22w2/3, r70c20w8, r74c22w8, r77c20w9, r83c14w17/c22w12, r88c25w4, r94c5w4	--
2 (646-652)	r109c19w1, r125c16w17, r130c10w8, r137c15w22, r145c9w3, r159c22w1, r161c23w23, r163c22w6, r172c18w8, r182c10w13, r188c13w19	--
3 (652-656)	r201c19w10, r210c22w10, r215c12w18, r218c22w20, r220c17w13, r222c19w15, r255c15w19, r278c14w3, r293c18w8	--
4 (656-660)	r328c18w1	r380c9w25, r381c18w8, r389c19w16, r398c30w8
5 (660-663)	--	r427c13w11, r435c18w7, r436c23w7, r445c18w7, r498c18w14

Table 3.4 Orthographies of *hun* 昏 in Tang stones (618-663)

3.4.4 *Die* 諫 was not tabooed before 658

The usage of *die* 諫 matches the occurrences of the above two characters perfectly. In total, it shows up twenty-three times, scattered sporadically throughout all the five volumes. As demonstrated in Table 3.5, only two forms were used. One is the normal form 諫; the other is

⁸⁰ Mao Hanguang 1986b:107 (transcription), 109 (rubbing). The stone is Rubbing 328, *Lu Huo shi zhi* 路霍氏誌. The top of this example is slightly damaged. Nevertheless, it is still possible to determine that the example is an orthodox form. In another version, this example is . For this illustration, see Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京圖書館金石組, 1997a:45.

the taboo form 諱. Except for one slightly damaged example in V.5 (r458c3w17), in which the taboo element 云 is recognizable, all other twenty-two examples are complete and crystal clear.

As attested by Table 3.5, the non/usage of these two forms is also divided by the cut-off date, the year 658. Before 658, only the normal form 諱 was used; after 658, only the taboo form 諱 occurs.

The first occurrence of the taboo form is found in the fifth volume, Rubbing 404, *Liu Yanshou zhi* 劉延壽誌. According to the inscription, Liu Yanshou died of illness at the age of sixty-one in “the fourth year of the Xianqin reign” (顯慶四年), and he was finally laid down to rest a few months later.⁸¹ The example is  (c6w12). In terms of orthography, there is no doubt that the right top part *shi* is the typical taboo form, 𠂔, rather than the orthodox form, 世.

Volumes	Orthodox form 諱	Taboo form 諱
1 (619-646)	r55c20w10, r70c4w10	--
2 (646-652)	r116c2w21, r119c3w4, r160c3w5, r171c3w1	--
3 (652-656)	r202c3w6, r214c6w5, r236c6w7, r249c3w24, r261c4w11, r276c4w3, r297c3w23	--
4 (656-660)	r310c5w5, r318c3w22, r321c6w19, r323c4w10, r331c5w13	--
5 (660-663)	--	r404c6w12, r419c3w17, r441c4w19, r458c3w17, r481c3w21

Table 3.5 Orthographies of *die* 諱 in Tang stones (618-663)

3.4.5 Summary of the survey

This survey demonstrates that the three forms, 昏, 諱 and 諱, are taboo forms. Their usage commenced no earlier than the year 658. Without exception, not an example on the Tang tombstones antedates Tang Gaozong’s order.

Consequently, it seems fair to claim that Tang China began to employ these taboo forms nationwide after 658. The driving force behind this change was the name taboo tradition. The direct reason was that in 658 Tang Gaozong ordered that the complex characters containing

⁸¹ Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 1986a:17 (transcription), 19 (rubbing).

Tang Taizong's name must be tabooed. Therefore, this survey also shows that the *gaijian* method first appeared in 658.

3.5 Discussion and conclusion

This analysis has demonstrated that the exigent name taboo tradition is a very useful tool for dating sources. It yields us critical information that allows us to come to grips with the making of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, because it points out not only to their dating but also to their authenticity.

In the first instance, the confirmed taboo examples of complex characters refute the conventional chronology of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. In the manuscripts, *hun* 昏 occurs in its taboo form, 昏. Although 昏 might have been used long before the seventh century, it never occurs on a Tang tombstone carved before 658. It seems that this old form had already become obsolete and been replaced by 昏 before the foundation of the Tang dynasty. However, the old form underwent a revival in order to facilitate the taboo on Tang Taizong's name and quickly became popular, appearing to have dislodged 昏 after 658. A similar argument applies to *qi* 棄 that is written in its ancient form, 弃, that probably had also become obsolete before the emergence of Tang China. Nevertheless, the taboo form, *die* 牒, is unambiguous. Before 658, none of the Tang stones ever uses this form, and all rubbings show that the orthodox orthography 牒 was used. After 658, all the stones adopted the taboo form. This pattern of using the taboo form is confirmed by the usage of its synonym, *die* 牒. Therefore we can confidently conclude that the manuscripts, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, could not have been made by Aluoben and presented to his great patron Tang Taizong sometime in the 640s. Before the death of Tang Taizong in 649, the complex characters were not tabooed. As demonstrated in the above, the avoidance of these complex characters was a new development in the name taboo tradition in Tang China in its own time. The *gaijian* method was invented in 658. It differs from *quebi*, a technique introduced no later than 648.

The second most important conclusion is that this inconsistent taboo practice disproves the forgery theory. The findings of this chapter show that the Christian sources did use the taboo forms of Tang Taizong's name but did so inconsistently. Besides in the taboos of the complex characters outlined above, there are some characters that were not avoided. The character *shi* contained in Tang Taizong's very name appears in its normal form. The same can be said of the complex character *min* 愍. Given this inconsistency, the forgery theory is an awkward customer to prove. It is hard to imagine that a forger would not have been aware of the

taboos attached to the towering figure of Tang Taizong, who is known as one of China's greatest emperors. Importantly, it is both logical and natural to argue that only a Chinese forger would have been cognizant with this indigenous Chinese tradition and therefore would have avoided the very character contained in Tang Taizong's name, *shi*. However, the inconsistency in its application in the Christian manuscripts shows that the forger was not particularly bothered about the character *shi*. On the contrary, what did exercise his mind greatly were the complex characters, and yet he did not avoid all the complex characters. Since it is universally admitted that a forger would push his skills to their limits to make a fake manuscript as much authentic as possible, it is really odd that this Chinese forger would have produced works that contain such glaring errors. What is even odder is that this forger seems to have been more accurately informed about the Tang taboo practice than almost any modern scholar. As shown above, researchers are only now beginning to understand the taboo on the complex characters. No consensus about this new method, *gaijian*, has yet been reached. A few taboo forms are being debated. Nevertheless, the fact remains that this putative forger outshone nearly all modern experts. His employment of the debatable taboo forms is almost perfectly in conformity with the Tang tombstone inscriptions that have never been systematically examined before this research. Given this surprising conformity, one might begin to wonder how an early-twentieth-century forger could ever have been equipped with knowledge so profound that he was informed with such accuracy about certain taboo forms that even today's best scholars do not yet completely comprehend. Indeed, as will be shown in Chapter 5, this forger's knowledge is too good to be true, and therefore the existing two Christian sources are not modern forgeries.

Lastly, the taboo inconsistency also suggests that the two Christian manuscripts could have been made much later than 658. The practice of avoiding Tang Taizong's name profoundly affected the language of the Chinese. His name remained tabooed so long that people's writing habits were fundamentally changed. Many later scribes seem to have taken the taboo forms of his name as common orthographies, continuing to use them on a large scale for a few centuries after the Tang court collapsed in 907. For instance, Dunhuang manuscripts made in the tenth century contain many such cases. In P.2649, that has been dated 984, *min* 民 was deprived of one stroke 𠂔; in S.4609 that was also dated 984, the complex character *die* 牒 is in the taboo form 牒.⁸² In fact, many complex characters were written in their taboo forms even at a much later time. This is confirmed by Zhang Shinan, a thirteenth-century

⁸² Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 2010:104-105.

official who served in many posts. Zhang Shinan wrote: “The character ‘*shi*’ offends Tang Taizong’s name *shimin*. Today, therefore, ‘牒’ [*die*], ‘葉’ [*ye*] and ‘棄’ [*qi*] are all deprived of *shi* and have been changed into ‘云’” (「世」字因唐太宗諱世民，故今「牒」、「葉」、「棄」，皆去「世」而多從「云」)。)⁸³ It seems that the Chinese people in the thirteenth century were still happily using the taboo forms of these complex characters. This fact opens the possibility that the two Chinese Christian manuscripts could have been written generations after Tang Taizong died in 649.

In sum, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are authentic ancient manuscripts. They could only have been made after the first period of the Tang church (arrival-diffusion, 635-649). The possibility that they were produced in the second phase of the Tang church, expansion-setback-recovery (649-790s), is in the topic of the next chapter.

⁸³ Zhang Shinan 張世南 1233/1981:77. For a brief introduction of Zhang Shinan and his works, see Cai Rongsheng 蔡榮生 and He Zhenzuo 何振作 (2010), and Peng Donghuan 彭東煥 (2004).

Chapter 4 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* cannot have been made in the 650s-790s

Under Heaven, every corner is the king's land. To the ends of the Earth, every human being is the king's subject. (普天之下，莫非王土。率土之濱，莫非王臣。)

– *The Shijing* 詩經

This chapter continues to investigate textual clues that are connected to China's supreme leaders, regardless of whether they were male or female, whose right to absolute power had been canonized in the Confucian classics for more than 1,000 years by the eighth century. Its three protagonists are two male emperors, Tang Gaozong and Tang Xuanzong, and China's only female emperor, Empress Wu, whose reigns coincided with much of the second period of the Tang church. It examines the taboos on their names and pays particular attention to the usage of the new orthographic forms promoted by Empress Wu between 689 and 690. On the basis of the evidence, the likelihood that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were produced between the 650s and the 790s is very slim.

4.1 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not made in Tang Gaozong's reign

Tang Gaozong was the third emperor of the Tang Dynasty. He ascended the throne in 649 and ruled China until 683. His single-character name, *zhi* 治, was commonly tabooed using three methods: omitting, replacing and *quebi*. Careful analysis shows that this character was not avoided by the scribe of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. This disregard of the taboo suggests that the two sources were not made either in or soon after Tang Gaozong's reign.

4.1.1 *Zhi* was not omitted

Acting in pious obedience Tang Chinese did not often commit *zhi* to paper. They removed *zhi* from many persons' names, government positions and common phrases. "In *The Nanshi* and *The Beishi*," Chen Yuan observes, "the titles of the officials, the *zhishu shiyushi* and the *zhizhong congshi*, are often deprived of the character *zhi*" (南北史於官名治書侍御史及治中從事，多脫去治字。)¹ *The Nanshi* and *The Beishi* are two official historical accounts of the Chinese dynasties that were established between the fourth and the seventh century. The two works were completed by Li Yanshou 李延壽 and were submitted to Tang Gaozong, who

¹ Chen Yuan 陳垣 1958:55. See also Piotr Adamek (2015:245).

wrote a preface to them in 659. Understandably given his position, as is attested by more examples given below, Li Yanshou paid the strictest of attention to the taboo practice. In the cases discussed by Chen Yuan, Li Yanshou had obviously chosen to omit *zhi* in order to observe the taboo on Tang Gaozong's name.

Intriguingly, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* deviate from this common practice. This method is not observed in either of the two manuscripts. So far, I have not found any possible example.

4.1.2 *Zhi* was not replaced by other characters

Depending on the context, Tang Chinese also used a number of synonyms to replace *zhi*. For example, *zhibing* 治兵 was changed to *libing* 理兵. The title of a source compiled in the fifth century to set out how to govern a county, *The Zhixianpu* 治縣譜, was renamed *The Lixianpu* 理縣譜 in *The Nanshi*. Both *zhi* and *li* here mean govern, rule or lead. For these frequently discussed replacement characters, see Table 4.1.²

Name	Replacement
<i>zhi</i> 治	<i>hua</i> 化, <i>li</i> 理, <i>chi</i> 持, <i>zheng</i> 政, <i>wei</i> 為, <i>xun</i> 循, <i>ling</i> 領, <i>zhu</i> 主, <i>zhang</i> 掌, <i>pan</i> 判, <i>pi</i> 庇, <i>liao</i> 療, <i>ju</i> 居, <i>xing</i> 興, <i>zu</i> 足, <i>du</i> 都

Table 4.1 Replacement characters used to taboo Tang Gaozong's name, *zhi*

There is not a shred of evidence that either *The Messiah Sutra* or *On One God* employs this method to avoid Tang Gaozong's name. Each of these Christian manuscripts uses several of the characters listed in Table 4.1., but none seems to be a replacement for *zhi*. Take the last two characters, *du* 都 and *zu* 足, for example. In the annotation to *The Houhanshu* 後漢書, Li Xian 李賢, Tang Gaozong's son, uses two interesting phrases, "*du Gaoling*" (都高陵) and "*du Mei*" (都郿).³ As pointed out by Wang Yankun, who compares Li Xian's annotations and earlier versions, *du* here has replaced *zhi*, and the original phrases would have been *zhi Gaoling* and *zhi Mei* that mean govern Gaoling county and govern Mei county respectively. In *The Messiah Sutra*, when *du* is employed it is definitely not used in this way. Although the character *du* does occur four times, every occurrence is contained in the phrase "*piluodusi*"

² This table and the above example are based on Wang Yankun 王彥坤 (2009:405-411).

³ *Ibid.*, 411.

(毗羅都思).⁴ As the immediate Chinese context, some part of which is quoted in Section 4.2.2.3, can be matched with the Biblical story of the trial of Jesus, there is no way to interpret this phrase other than to conclude that it is the phonetic transcription of Pilatus (𐌱𐌹𐌻𐌰𐌸𐌹𐍃) who presided over the trial, and *du* fits the transcription almost perfectly.⁵ Obviously, *du* was not being used as a substitute for *zhi* because the sound of *du* is crucial to an acceptable transcription.

Something similar can be said about the character *zu*. When Li Yanshou submitted *The Nanshi* to Tang Gaozong, he modified “*tianxia bian zhi*” (天下便治), a phrase used in the fifth-century source *The Songshu* 宋書, and substituted the last character *zhi* with *zu*: “*tianxia bian zu*” (天下便足).⁶ In *On One God*, all its twenty-four occurrences are not taboo forms. In Columns 170-172, for instance, *zu* is used three times to denounce those who are led astray by devils and are fairly ignorant about the One God. This Christian manuscript excoriates that those people are no better than “*sizu chusheng*” (四足畜生), that means four-legged animals.⁷ The phrase *sizhi chusheng* would not make any sense at all.

4.1.3 *Zhi* was not deprived of its strokes

We shall probably never know just how quickly the *quebi* method was widely adopted. Tang people were particularly attached to this method. Although the first cases, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, are dated 648, this method had already become fairly popular by Tang Gaozong’s reign. In fact, *zhi* was written in the ‘wrong’ forms so frequently that Tang Gaozong himself seems to have been fairly disturbed by it. In the year 660, his irritation prompted him to issue an edict curbing the excessive tabooing of his name. *The Tanghuiyao* records:⁸

On the first day of the first month in the fifth year of the Xianqing reign, it was decreed: “[...] When the ancient classics are copied, my name is either randomly deprived of strokes or substituted. I am afraid the meaning of the elegant words of the Six Canons will suffer. Should the versions be spread far and wide, their meanings will be changed completely. This is not the purpose for which books were created. Henceforward, copying and editing old and canonic works shall be done in an appropriate manner. There is no need to replace and modify [my name] in according to the immediate meaning. 顯慶五年正月一日詔。[...] 比見抄寫古典。至於朕名。或缺其點畫。或隨便改換。恐六籍雅言。會意多爽。九流通義。指事全違。誠非立書之本。自今以後。繕寫舊典文字。並宜使成。不須隨義改易。

⁴ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:400-401, Cols. 153, 154, 155, 159.

⁵ For the analysis of this name, see Hidemi Takahashi (2013:15).

⁶ Wang Yankun 王彥坤 2009:411.

⁷ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:365, Col. 170.

⁸ Wang Pu 王溥 961/1955:452.

In this quotation, two observations stand out. One concerns the pre-promulgation conditions. The decree reveals that the taboo practice was already very popular by 660. People were fanatical about avoiding the ruling emperor's name *zhi*. Consequently, as the decree reveals, many canonical texts were being changed to such a degree that their original meanings were altered, impairing their proper reading.

The other observation is that Tang people were using two methods. One method was to replace *zhi* with other characters. The popularity of this method has been confirmed by the above analysis of *The Nanshi*. The other method was *quebi*. Although Tang Gaozong neither used this particular term nor offered an example of it, there is little doubt that he was referring to the *quebi* method. The Chinese phrase “*que qi dian hua*” (缺其點畫) is unambiguous. The four characters contained in this phrase are neither complicated characters nor are they difficult to understand. Each is simple and straightforward. Except by reading these characters using the *quebi* method, there is no way to interpret them. In other words, the *quebi* method was being widely used by Tang Chinese for some time before 660.

To elaborate in even greater detail on the taboos of *zhi*, this section adds one special case that has never been discussed anywhere else before. In *The Zhou Zhongyin muzhi* 周仲隱墓誌, the character *zhi* is deprived of its last two strokes, 𠂔 (c20w30). This example occurs in a straightforward phrase “*zhiren*” (治人).⁹ Compared with the other known taboo forms, this example is very rare. Whereas most *quebi* occurrences are deprived of the last stroke, as said this example lacks the last two strokes. Compare it with 𠂔 (P.2536), 𠂔 (S.203) and 𠂔 (P.3742).¹⁰ What makes this case even more special is that this is the earliest known *quebi* taboo of Tang Gaozong's name. According to the inscription, Zhou Zhongyin was buried on “the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month in [...] the twenty-third year of the Zhenguan reign” (貞觀廿三年 [...] 十月廿五日, 649), just five months after Tang Gaozong's enthronement.¹¹

In stark contrast to the extravagant practice of avoiding Tang Gaozong's name using the *quebi* method, *On One God* does not observe the taboo on his name. *Zhi* occurs only once in this

⁹ Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京圖書館金石組 1997b:200.

¹⁰ The first example occurs three times in P.2536. All occurrences lack the very last stroke. The last two examples are cited from Huang Zheng 黃征 (2005:556). For a short list of other Dunhuang manuscripts that employ these taboo forms, see also Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:244).

¹¹ Beijing tushuguan jinshizu 北京圖書館金石組 1997b:200.

Christian manuscript. Its handwritten form, 治 (c391w8), is the very common orthography that is still being used today.¹² Indubitably, it is not a (*quebi*) taboo.

4.1.4 Discussion

It would seem that the use of the taboo practice had become excessive by Tang Gaozong's reign. But, despite his efforts to limit this extravagance, his name was still widely tabooed. Pertinently, it should be recalled that in his reign Aluoben had a very high title bestowed on him and Christians seem to have built churches in many cities and propagated their faith in several Tang provinces. In the light of this information, it would have been only reasonable that, had the two Christian sources been written then they would have embraced the name taboo tradition and strictly avoided *zhi*, the name of their great patron.

However, the findings tell a rather different story. *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* openly 'violate' the general name taboo practice. Unlike the scrupulous avoidance observed by the Tang people, the scribe who penned them did not eschew Tang Gaozong's name and even more importantly this obvious violation is in stark contradiction to the intimate church-court relationship that is documented on the Xi'an Stele erected in 781. Therefore, the most probable explanation is that the two Christian manuscripts had not been made before Tang Gaozong died in 683. They must have been made at a later date when strict observance of the taboo practice had slackened or when there was no longer a need to refrain from using Tang Gaozong's name.

4.2 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not made in Empress Wu's reign

Two strands of evidence suggest that the two Christian manuscripts were not produced between 683 and 705. One is the non-usage of the new orthographic forms promoted by Empress Wu. The other one is the non-taboo of her name, *zhao* 曷. I shall begin by offering examples of these new forms and explain their wide usage before I examine the usage of these new forms, including her name, in the two Christian manuscripts.

4.2.1 The usage of Wu's new forms and the dating of a source

The term 'Wu's new forms' (武周新形) has been coined from the phrase the 'Wu's new characters' (武周新字) that is used in the secondary literature to refer to the new

¹² Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:385. This character does not occur in *The Messiah Sutra*.

orthographic forms promoted by Empress Wu between 689 and 697.¹³ Of these forms, twelve were officially promulgated in December of 689, and five more were introduced after she changed the dynastic title from Tang to Zhou in 690. In point of fact, Empress Wu actually only created one single character, her name *zhao* 曌. All of the other allegedly new characters had been in use for a long time. Her court did no more than modify their orthodox orthographies, ordering people to use new forms in writing. Hence, this dissertation coins and prefers the phrase ‘Wu’s new forms’.

Pertinently the non/usage of these forms (including her name) serves as an additional but nonetheless useful method by which to date sources, including our manuscripts.¹⁴ The reason is twofold. Firstly, the new forms are obviously different from the orthodox orthographies. Secondly and more importantly, the non/usage of these forms like the taboo of a name also has a clear temporal demarcation. The new forms quickly replaced old orthographies and were widely employed in China. After Empress Wu was deposed in 705, they were immediately revoked by the restored Li family and fell into general disuse. I shall examine these two reasons individually.

4.2.1.1 Why were the new forms widely used?

The widespread usage of these new forms, demonstrated below, was the outcome of the political factors that lurked behind the promotion of these new forms.

In the edict *Gaiyuan zaichu shewen* 改元載初赦文 that was issued in December 689, Empress Wu claimed that the promotion of new forms was a Chinese tradition and that the new forms would safeguard the foundations of the empire by restoring the values of antiquity and purity. As this edict is extremely long (almost 3,000 characters) and contains information about her enthronement that took place ten months later, I shall confine myself to a discussion of the part relevant to the encouragement of the use of the new forms: twelve forms (characters) in total. The illustrations of all new forms are listed in Table 4.2 below. The crucial elements of the edict that are of the most interest are as follows:¹⁵

The reason people have names, I am also aware, is [...] to serve Heaven and people with reverence. [...] And] I shall use 曌 [Zhao] as my name. [...] When the Qin dynasty conquered the

¹³ For the latter term and a concise summary of the field, see Jiang Aihua 蔣愛花 and An Shaofan 安劭凡 (2014).

¹⁴ For this general conclusion, see Imre Galambos (2012:112-113), Antonino Forte (2005:55-60), J.P. Drège (1984), and Zhang Yongquan 張湧泉 (2011:631-632).

¹⁵ Song Minqiu 宋敏求 1070/1959:19-20. See also Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:64), and Wang Weikun 王維坤 (1987:64).

lands under Heaven, [...] it created the Qin writing [...] that was inherited by the two Han dynasties. [...] Since the Wei-Jin period, however, all dynasties have been deficient in learned skills, and any newly created characters appear to [...] deviate from the older [style of] writing. As a consequence, later people and students have been thrown into total confusion and the texts of the ancient kings are neglected. [...] We shall restore the sagacity of the ancient kings [...]; however, these customs have become entrenched and cannot easily be changed immediately. Therefore, [I] have taken the initiative on behalf of the officials of creating twelve characters [new forms]. Speaking of the past, these characters [new forms] emulate the older forms; looking towards the future, they will inaugurate a new language. I believe that they will safeguard the enduring foundations of the Empire and demonstrate that we want to return to purity [of yesteryear]. (朕又聞之。人必有名者。[.....] 尊事天人。[.....] 朕宜以璽為名。[.....] 秦兼天下。[.....] 爰創隸書。自著秦文。[.....] 兩漢因之 [.....] 魏晉以降。代乏名儒。[.....] 結造新字。[.....] 古今訛舛。[.....] 遂使後生學徒。罔知所據。先王載籍。從此湮沈。[.....] 思返上皇之化。[.....] 但習俗多時。良難頓改。特創制一十二字。率先百辟。上有依於詁 [古] 體。下有改於新文。庶保可久之基。方表還淳之意。)

Despite the careful phrasing of this edict, Empress Wu's real aims in promoting the new forms were not as pure as she set out. The promotion of these new forms, Norman Harry Rothschild notes, "reflects a series of inter-related strategies, designed not only to gain political legitimacy, but to redefine it".¹⁶ The campaign to change the old forms and popularize new ones, Antonino Forte points out, was invested with "ideological motivations".¹⁷ Undoubtedly, Empress Wu seems to have understood that language can be easily manipulated and this manipulation could ultimately reap her immense political benefit.

In fact, the reasons for encouraging these new forms were very subtle. First and foremost, the new forms were deeply embedded in traditional Confucian ideologies. As indicated by the new form of *chen*  (𡗗), the elements of which it is composed give a graphic description of what a good minister should be: always faithful. The top element is *yi* 一, that connotes always; the lower is *zhong* 忠, that means faithful. The combination of these two elements to replace the old form 臣 conveyed a clear message to her ministers that they should redirect their loyalty from the deposed Li family to Empress Wu and keep faith with this new ruler.

Empress Wu also utilized these forms shrewdly to underline her position, importance and uniqueness. Her name, *zhao* 曌, seems to be even more illustrative of this point than any other forms. This newly created character is a composite of the most magnificent celestial bodies. The left top is sun (日); the right top moon (月); the bottom sky (空). By assuming this

¹⁶ N. Harry Rothschild 2009:145.

¹⁷ Antonino Forte 2005:57.

name, she “cast herself as a light-bearer, a luminary nurturing a populace with her sage presence”, elevating herself above everybody else.¹⁸

Significantly, these forms involved religion, Buddhism in particular. Antonino Forte has shown that one of the earliest official documents to use the first twelve new forms, *The Dayujingshu* 大雲經疏, Dunhuang manuscript S.6502, was a piece of political propaganda meticulously crafted to prophesy that Empress Wu would become both a bodhisattva and a Cakravartin who would rule the world as a female emperor.¹⁹ Unquestionably, the way the old forms were modified seems to have been influenced by religion. At the very least, the new form of

yue 月 first released in 689 was closely related to Buddhism. Examining the new form  — for this rubbing, see Table 4.2 — Shi Anchang was the first to suggest that what is inside the circle is the Buddhist symbol of a swastika 卐.²⁰ As new tombstones have been found, Shi

Anchang’s postulation has been confirmed. For instance, this clearer example  was used on *Yangfujunbei* 楊府君碑. This stone was carved in Empress Wu’s reign. It was unearthed in Xi’an in 2014 and is now housed in the Xi’an Stele Museum.²¹

In a nutshell, the motivations underlying the promotion these new forms were complex. They anticipated a new beginning and a new era in which a woman could rule and could be an emperor like any man. Their promotion was part of Empress Wu’s overall strategy to legitimize her rule, display her power and secure her position.

4.2.1.2 Empress Wu changed seventeen characters into eighteen forms

On account of the incompleteness of sources and the loss of the original edicts, how many forms were promulgated and what exactly these forms were has puzzled Chinese scholars since the eleventh century. Many have claimed that Empress Wu introduced more than fourteen forms; some have argued that the court promoted twelve; a few have asserted that only eight forms were changed. Although some aspects of these new forms are still unclear, a more accurate picture of Wu’s new forms has emerged since the 1980s, and this has led to a general acceptance of Shi Anchang’s theory.²² Analyzing examples found on bricks, steles,

¹⁸ N. Harry Rothschild 2009:148.

¹⁹ For more detail, see Antonino Forte’s monograph on this manuscript (2005).

²⁰ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:56-57.

²¹ I have cited this sample from a Xi’an local news edited by Zhou Yantao 周豔濤 on November 15, 2014.

²² This scholarly debate dragged into the twentieth century, and the bulk of the literature published over the past 1,000 years or so has been neatly summarized by Qi Yuantao 齊元濤 (2005:78). See also Lu Shanhuan 盧善煥 (2011:100). For Shi Anchang’s contribution, see N. Harry Rothschild (2009:141).

tombstones and in Dunhuang manuscripts, calligraphic works and historical accounts, Shi Anchang points out that some alleged forms were in fact not actually encouraged by Empress Wu. He argues that Empress Wu modified seventeen forms in five installments between 689 and 697. He has determined that eighteen new forms in all were released because the character *yue* was changed twice (689, 697). The times of the promotion and the orthodox orthographies are — for the illustrations, see Table 4.2:²³

The first batch included these twelve characters: *tian* 天, *di* 地, *ri* 日, *yue* 月, *xing* 星, *nian* 年, *zheng* 正, *jun* 君, *chen* 臣, *zai* 載, *chu* 初 and *zhao* 曀. They were released in 689 in the abovementioned edict.

Batch 2 consisted of only one character, *shou* 授. As the first occurrence of its new form was dated 690, this character seems to have been changed when she adopted the new regnal title, Tianshou 天授, and ascended the throne in October 690.

Batch 3 contained two characters, *zheng* 證 and *sheng* 聖. They must have been changed soon after the regnal title Yanzai 延載 was replaced by Zhengsheng in November 694. The earliest examples of their new forms are dated later than 694.

Batch 4 again involved just one character, *guo* 國. The first case was dated 695.

Batch 5 consisted of two characters: *ren* 人 and *yue* 月. The earliest usages of their new forms have been traced to 697.

This promotion process is of course a reconstruction. The specific dates have been proposed on the basis of the very first occurrences used on Tang tombstones and in some other records. Nevertheless, so far the hypothesis of seventeen-characters-eighteen-forms has gained wide acceptance. No serious objection has yet been spelt out. Examining more than 400 stones dated between 689 and 704, for instance, Chen Lijun generally agrees with Shi Anchang, although she argues that Empress Wu promoted only four batches of new forms. She proposes that *chen* was changed in 690 rather than 689 and *zheng*, *sheng* and *guo* were promoted together in one batch in 695.²⁴

4.2.1.3 Wu's new forms were widely used before 705

²³ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:84.

²⁴ Chen Lijun 陳俐君 2014:12.

Probably because the power of the state was involved and the court promulgated edicts to promote Empress Wu's new forms, proximity to or distance from the imperial political center would not have curtailed their reach. Archeological excavations have shown that all new forms were widely employed not only in official documents and religious texts but also in private manuscripts and on lay tombstones that were made between 689 and 704. Among 422 stones found from Xinjiang in the west to Shandong 山東 in the east and from Liaoning 遼寧 in the north to Guangdong 廣東 in the south, Chen Lijun states: "The only tombstone that does not use any of Wu's new forms" (唯一一篇全文皆未使用武后改字墓誌銘文) is *Dugu fujun gufuren Yang shi muzhiming* 獨孤府君故夫人楊氏墓誌銘 that was dated 703.²⁵ On this stone, *nian*, *yue*, *ri* and other characters all retained their normal orthographies. It was buried in Wannian 萬年, a county under the jurisdiction of Xi'an. A frustrating lack of information means that we are completely in the dark about why this family failed to use Wu's new forms.

By and large, all these forms were quickly adopted. For example, the first twelve forms might have been used immediately upon their promulgation. The very moment seems to be encapsulated on *Yuan Zhiwei zhi* 元智威誌 found in Luoyang. On this tombstone, no fewer than nine new forms were used: *jun* (c1w12, c8w13, c11w10), *zheng* (c3w15), *nian* (c3w21, c11w15, c12w13, c15w15, c16w14, c25w15), *di* (c4w7), *yue* (c15w15, c16w21), *ri* (c15w18, c17w1), *zai* (c16w11), *chu* (c16w12) and *tian* (c19w4). Interestingly, all these new forms were not part of the original carvings. There is clear evidence of re-sanding and re-chiseling on the places on which these new forms were carved. The most obvious explanation of this reworking is: the stone had been carved before the promulgation but the first batch of Wu's new forms was implemented just before the funeral, and hence all common forms were erased and replaced by the new forms. The inscription records that the deceased had died two years before the introduction of the new forms, on "the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month in the third year of the Chuigong reign" (垂拱三年五月廿八日); however, the funeral took place five days after the promulgation of the Empress Wu's edict, on "the fifth day [...] of the eleventh month [...] in the first year of the Zaichu reign" (載初元年[.....]十一[.....]五日).²⁶

²⁵ Chen Lijun 陳俐君 2014:3, 151.

²⁶ Given the difficulty of using these new forms, the Chinese of these dates has been updated using modern forms. In addition, under the terms of the Empress Wu's edict, the last date contains a mistake. The eleventh month should be *zhengyue* 正月, that is the first month of the year. When promoting the new forms, Empress Wu also renamed the eleventh month to *zhengyue*; the twelfth month *layue* 臘月; *zhengyue* of the coming year *yiyue* (一月). Moreover, the character *yue* 月 was mistakenly changed into the new form of *ri* 日. For the dates, rubbing and mistakes, see Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 (1991b:283-287).

Such a rapid implementation is also nicely illustrated by *Chen Ping zhi* 陳平誌. According to this inscription, this tombstone was buried on the first day of *layue* in the first year of the Zaichu reign (載初元年臘月朔一日), one month after the Empress Wu's edict.²⁷ On this stone, *jun* (c1w11, c2w1, c8w2), *xing* (c3w9, c18w5), *zheng* (c6w1), *tian* (c9w1, c10w13), *chu* (c10w2, c14w12), *nian* (c12w2, c13w16, c14w14), *yue* (c12w4, c13w18, c14w20, c20w2), *ri* (c12w7, c13w20, c15w4), and *zai* (c14 w11) are all found in their new forms. All examples are complete and clear. There is no sign of re-carving. This stone was discovered in Xinzhou 忻州, a county that lies about 600 kilometers north of Luoyang.

As has just been implied, the new forms were also being used simultaneously in places that were situated far from the political centers. *Wang Renqiu bei* 王仁求碑 dated 698 and discovered in Southwest China, for instance, employs several new forms like *tian*, *di*, *guo* and *sheng*.²⁸

4.2.1.4 Revoking Wu's new forms after 705

Wu's new forms were quickly revoked and generally fell into disuse when Empress Wu was overthrown in 705.²⁹ The edict, *Jiwei shewen* 即位赦文, ordered that these new forms be no longer used. It was issued by Tang Zhongzong on the day on which he was restored to power:³⁰

As our enterprises have been reformed, this matter will also be re-organized. It is proper to change [our country's designation] from *Dazhou* to *Tang*. [...] Characters such as *tian* and *di* [...] shall hark back to the old practice prior to the Yongchun reign [682-683]. 業既惟新。事宜更始。可改大周為唐。[.....] 天地等字。[.....] 並依永淳已前故事。

The speed with which the characters fell into disuse is also confirmed by other sources. In general, post-705 tombstones and Dunhuang manuscripts abandoned these new forms, and resorted to pre-Wu characters again.³¹ In 837, Tang Wenzong 唐文宗 issued another edict again renouncing Wu's new forms: "In the tenth month of the second year [of the Kaicheng reign], it is ordered that the twelve characters created by the Heavenly Empress [Empress Wu]

²⁷ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:47; Chen Lijun 陳俐君 2014:157. The Chinese of this date has also been updated to the modern writing system. For the rubbing and inscription, see Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 (1991b:303-307).

²⁸ Lu Xixing 陸錫興 2011:126. See also Jiang Aihua 蔣愛花 and An Shaofan 安劭凡 (2014:056).

²⁹ Shi Anchang 施安昌 2002:84; Jiang Aihua 蔣愛花 and An Shaofan 安劭凡 2014:056.

³⁰ Dong Gao 董誥 1819/1983:206-207.

³¹ For this conclusion, see Jean-Pierre Drège (1984), Wang Sanqing 王三慶 (2005, 1986), and Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:118-130).

shall be abandoned and restored to their original forms”([開成] 二年十月詔曰天后所撰十二字並卻書其本字).³²

This does not necessarily mean that all new forms were completely abolished. Some language innovations, once they have been introduced, are tenacious and die very hard. As these new forms had already been in use for more than fifteen years, they still continued to be employed for quite some time. They can even occasionally be found in Dunhuang manuscripts made in the tenth and eleventh centuries.³³ For example, the new form *guo* 𠂔 (圀) occurs in P. 2187 that is dated 944.³⁴ Consequently, as the sources indicate, some of Wu’s new forms might have been used in much later times. The new form *guo* 𠂔 was employed in the rugged terrains of present-day Southwest China well up into the twelfth century, if not later. It has been found in No. 12 Cave of the *Jianchuan Shizhongshan* 劍川石鐘山第 12 窟, a Buddhist inscription carved in 850; the *Jianjun qidaiwang shu* 薦舉七代亡疏, a ritual text composed in 1052; the *Dali Congshengsi Qianxunta tongpian mingwen* 大理崇聖寺千尋塔銅片銘文, an inscription on a copper plate cast in 1116, and the *Xingbaosi dehuamin* 興寶寺德化銘, a Buddhist monastery inscription composed in 1186.³⁵

4.2.2 The non-use of Empress Wu’s new forms in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

The scribe of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* seems to have been ignorant of Wu’s new forms. None of the new forms occurs in the two manuscripts. The only possible usage 𠂔, that could have been the new form of *chen*, is a scribal error. This non-usage strongly intimates that the two Christian manuscripts were not made in Empress Wu’s reign. In order to enable the reader to get a good grasp of the non-usage, I shall compare Wu’s new forms with actual occurrences one by one.

4.2.2.1 Comparing examples with Wu’s new forms

Not all the seventeen changed characters occur in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. Characters like *jun* 君, *chen* 臣 and *zhao* 𠂔 are absent. Nevertheless, some do occur fairly frequently. For instance, the character *tian*, that was promoted in the first batch, occurs

³² Wang Qinruo 王欽若 1013/1989:337.

³³ For a good list, see Wang Sanqing 王三慶 2005, 1986.

³⁴ See also Ma Shichang 馬世長 1989:20.

³⁵ Zhang Nan 張楠 1992:61.

eighty times in *The Messiah Sutra* and 137 times in *On One God*. In most cases, it is used in one of the key theological phrases, *tianzun* 天尊 (God), discussed in Chapter 2.

However, as demonstrated by Table 4.2, the forms that occur in the two Christian manuscripts are completely different to Wu's new forms. With the exception of the form of *chen*, that will be discussed separately below, not a single example even looks similar to its corresponding new form. Few examples, in point of fact, ever diverge from the norm and are written in strange variants. All are in their orthodox forms. Most are still being used today — for instance, *tian* 天 (天), and *di* 地 (地).

Before I venture any further, I would like to say something about the samples I have used. All the illustrations are the first unequivocal occurrences in the surviving sources. Wu's new forms are cited from the tombstones edited by Mao Hanguang.³⁶ As that of *Yuan Zhiwei zhi* was re-carved and some forms, although legible, are not very clear, this research has set it to one side. The first nine examples are quoted from the aforementioned *Chen Ping zhi* carved in 690. The illustration *di* is taken from that of *Tang Xiaogu zhi* 唐小姑誌 that was also buried in 690.³⁷ Two cases, *chen* and *shou*, have been scanned from that of *Xu fanshi zhi* 許樊氏誌 that was also buried in 690.³⁸ The form *sheng* occurs on that of *Qi Lang zhi* 齊朗誌 erected in 694.³⁹ The sample *zheng* is found on that of *Gu Pilou shi zhi* 古匹婁氏誌 that was carved one day after that of *Qi Lang zhi*.⁴⁰ The form *guo* was used on *Wang Sine zhi* 王思訥誌 that bears the date 695.⁴¹ The last two examples were employed on that of *Qin Lang zhi* 秦郎誌 that was also carved 695.⁴² Empress Wu's name *zhao*, as it was avoided — see Section 4.2.3, disappeared almost completely from daily life, and no illustration of it is offered.

All the examples in the Christian manuscripts are taken from *The Messiah Sutra*. However, the form *yue* does not occur in this text, but it is cited from *On One God*. Moreover, as the character *yue* 月 was changed two times, I shall also deal with it twice.

Batches	Promotion time	Orthodox forms	Wu's new forms	Occurrences in Christian sources	Examples in Christian sources

³⁶ For the impressive list of Tang stone examples, see Chen Lijun 陳俐君 (2014:14-138, 168-1042). For samples collected from other sources including the Dunhuang manuscripts, see Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:43-130) and J.P. Drège (1984:341).

³⁷ Mao Hanguang 毛漢光 1991b:451.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 461.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1991a:369.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 375.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1992:137.

1	載初元年正月 December 689	tian 天	 (c9w1)	217	天 (c2w7)
		ri 日	 (c12w7)	23	日 (c61w4)
		yue 月 ^a	 (c12w4)	6	月 (c250w17)
		xing 星	 (c18w5)	3	星 (c125w14)
		nian 年	 (c14w14)	10	年 (c128w5)
		zheng 正	 (c6w1)	3	正 (c14w4)
		jun 君	 (c1w11)	--	--
		zai 載	 (c14w11)	--	--
		chu 初	 (c14w12)	3	--
		di 地	 (c15w2)	41	地 (c16w17)
		chen 臣	 (c4w5)	--	--
		zhao 墨	--	--	--
2	天授元年九月 October 690	shou 授	 (c11w2)	--	--
3	證聖元年正月 November 694	zheng 證	 (c15w9)	4	證 (c91w11)
		sheng 聖	 (c14w13)	36	聖 (c63w5)
4	證聖元年四、五月 May/June 695	guo 國	 (c3w19)	4	國 (c37w12)
5	聖曆元年正月 December 697	ren 人	 (c15w6)	242	人 (c4w14)
		yue 月 ^b	 (c11w13)	6	月 (c250w17)

Table 4.2 Comparison of orthographies in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* with Wu's new forms

4.2.2.2 The form is a scribal error of e 惡

The only usage of Wu's new forms that arouses any suspicion in the two Christian manuscripts is  (c161w4), that occurs once in *The Messiah Sutra*.⁴³ Haneda Toru was the

⁴³ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:401.

first person to note this form and doubt that it was Wu's new form *chen* 𡇗. He writes that this form might shed some light on the time of making *The Messiah Sutra*, suggesting that this manuscript could have been made "earlier than the Mid-Tang" (中唐以前).⁴⁴ However, he quickly discarded this supposition, claiming that it was an error of *e* 𡇗, a variant of 惡 that means evil and is used many times (35 and 80 respectively) in both *The Messiah Sutra* and in *On One God*.

Haneda Toru's suspicion was justified. Even though this form does not deviate from the new form and looks exactly the same as the sample offered in Table 4.2, it is very probably a scribal error of *e* 𡇗.

The reasons for this assumption are several. First of all, *e* 𡇗 makes much more sense than *chen*. The character is used in the Gospel story of Jesus' death. The surrounding context is that the Messiah was accused by *eyuanren* (惡緣人, evil persons), who demanded that Pilate pass the death sentence. Although the example quoted is not attached to *yuanren* 緣人 in the original text, there is little doubt that the complete phrase is *eyuanren* 惡緣人:⁴⁵

[Pilate reiterated:] "I really cannot kill this person." The evil persons resubmitted the request and insisted on demanding the death penalty. The Messiah [intended to] give his life to the 𡇗 (evil) [persons]. For the sake of all the living, He warned the humans in this world and instructed that human life is but a flickering candle and that to die for them is to give alms to all persons alive today. The Messiah / [decided to give] his life to [the evil persons] and embraced death completely. The evil persons then [took] the Messiah to another place, [...] and [bound] him to a piece of wood. 我實不能煞其人/惡緣人等更重諮請非不煞不得弥師訶 [欲]將/身施与 𡇗 [緣人] 為一切眾生/譴[誡]世間人等[告] 知其人/命如轉燭為今世眾生布施代命受死弥師/訶[決意]將自身[施]与[惡緣人]遂即受死惡業人乃將弥師訶/[帶到]别处 [.....] 即[系]木上縛着

Secondly, the form 𡇗 is similar to the form of *e* 𡇗. The former differs slightly from the latter, that is consistently written as 𡇗 (c161w1) throughout the two sources.⁴⁶ The only difference is that the former has one middle vertical line whereas the latter has two. Given this, it would seem correct to assume that the former is "a merely ignorant or careless form

⁴⁴ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1926:126.

⁴⁵ This is quoted from *The Messiah Sutra*, Cols. 160-165. See Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:401-402).

⁴⁶ This example is quoted from Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:401).

of a common word.”⁴⁷ In other words, it is not one of Wu’s new forms and hence it does not contain any clue to the time of making the two Christian sources.

4.2.3 The non-taboo of Empress Wu’s name in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

Empress Wu’s name *zhao* 曩 was widely tabooed.⁴⁸ As far as I know, only two extant sources ever used her name. One is the 689 edict mentioned above that introduced her name to the Tang Chinese. The other one is *Wu Zhao Jinjian* 武曩金簡, a strip of gold accidentally found by a farmer in 1982 and now housed in Henan Museum 河南博物館.⁴⁹ This strip was made for the personal benefit of Empress Wu and was inscribed with a sixty-three-character petition to the gods. It was hurled from the peak of the holy mountain Songshan 嵩山 in 700, supplicating the gods to “erase Wu Zhao’s wrongdoings” (除武曩罪名).⁵⁰ Even on this strip, the character *zhao* was written half the size of other characters to avoid offending Empress Wu.⁵¹

Besides the character for her name in particular, the character *zhao* 照 was also tabooed. To avoid using this character, for instance, one of Empress Wu’s grandsons was even renamed. “Prince Yide, Chongrun, was the first son of Zhongzong. His former name was Chongzhao but this was changed in order to avoid [Wu] Zetian’s name” (懿德太子重潤，中宗長子也。本名重照，以避則天諱，故改焉。).⁵² The character *zhao* 照 could also be replaced by other characters like *guang* 光. A Buddhist monastery, *Puzhaowangsi* 普照王寺, was renamed *Puguangwangsi* 普光王寺.⁵³

Another character, *zhao* 詔, was also prohibited. For example, Empress Wu’s court changed *zhaoshu* to *zhishu*. *The Jiutangshu* documents: The Empress “named herself using the character *zhao* and changed *zhaoshu* into *zhishu* immediately” (自以「曩」字為名，遂改詔書為制書).⁵⁴

⁴⁷ A.C. Moule 1930:58.

⁴⁸ For this taboo, see Piotr Adamek (2015:251) and Wang Yankun 王彥坤 (2009:386-387).

⁴⁹ For more details, see the official website of Henan Museum 河南博物館, http://www.chnmus.net/dcjp/201307/22/content_12412.htm.

⁵⁰ For a photo of this strip and a short introduction, see T. H. Barrett (2008:91-93).

⁵¹ For more details, see Shi Anchang 施安昌 (2002:53-54).

⁵² Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:2834.

⁵³ Wang Yankun 王彥坤 2009:386.

⁵⁴ Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:120. This avoidance is further confirmed by *The Tangliudian* 唐六典, a compendium of state offices of the Tang dynasty compiled at the command of Xuanzong in 722 and submitted to the throne by Li Linfu in 738. In the commentary about using *zhishu*, this source acknowledges the name taboo tradition: “In the first year of the Tianshou reign of the Heavenly Empress [Empress Wu, 690], *zhao* 詔 was changed to *zhi* 制

Having cleared up this matter, let us examine whether or not the two Christian sources avoided Empress Wu's name. Quite clearly, the names *zhao* 曐 and *zhao* 照 do not occur at all.

However, the character *zhao* 詔 is spotted in *On One God*. As attested by the example  (c338w15), this sole occurrence does not deviate from the orthodox form.⁵⁵ It is not a taboo. This suggests that the two Christian manuscripts did not taboo Empress Wu's name.

4.2.4 Discussion

Empress Wu assiduously promoted the new forms in her covert pursuit of her hidden political agenda. All new forms (with the exception of her name) were widely used until 705. Since Wu's new forms differ radically from their previous orthographies, they are reliable indicators of the time of the making a manuscript. Moreover, her name *zhao* 曐 was avoided. The usage of these new forms and the observance of the taboo practice is therefore a convincing intimation that a particular source was made in Empress Wu's reign. Conversely, the deviation clearly indicates that the source must be dated before and/or after her rule.

Given that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* do not employ a single new form and do not observe the taboo custom, we can be certain that neither source was made in Empress Wu's reign. Since we have already excluded the period before Empress Wu on the basis of the absence of other taboo characters, we do not need to concern ourselves any further with the possibility that the two Christian manuscripts antedate her reign.

4.3 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not made in Tang Xuanzong's reign

Tang Xuanzong was the sixth male Tang ruler. He ascended the throne in 712 and ruled China until 756. His name contains two characters, *long* 隆 and *ji* 基. Both characters were commonly avoided. However, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* do not taboo either of them. This suggests that the two manuscripts were not made in or soon after Tang Xuanzong's reign.

4.3.1 *Long* and *ji* were not omitted

In Tang China, like other emperors' names, both *long* and *ji* were also removed from many persons' names, designations of government positions and customary expressions. For

owing to the taboo practice.” (天后天授元年，以避諱，該詔為制。) For *The Tang Liudian*, see Li Linfu 李林甫 (738/1992:274).

⁵⁵ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:380.

example, Tang Xuanzong's brother, Longfan 隆範, was renamed Fan. This avoidance was preserved in historical annals. "Fan, Prince Huiwen, was the fourth son of Ruizong. His previous name was Longfan. Later, he used a single-character name Fan in order to avoid [Tang] Xuanzong's two-character name" (惠文太子範，睿宗第四子也。本名隆範，後避玄宗連名，改單稱範。).⁵⁶ Another of Tang Xuanzong's brothers, Longye 隆業, also used a new name Ye 業.⁵⁷

Unlike the Chinese sources, however, neither of the two Christian manuscripts observes a taboo on Tang Xuanzong's name using this method. I have not noted any case of this.

4.3.2 Long and ji were not replaced by other characters

To avoid Tang Xuanzong's name, both *long* and *ji* could also be replaced by other characters — see Table 4.3.⁵⁸ Examples of the renaming of Chinese counties by this method are readily found in private sources and historical annals like *The Jiutangshu*. For example, Hualong 化隆, a county named after the famous local topographical feature, the Hualong Valley, was "changed to Huacheng County in the first year of the Xiantian reign" (先天元年，改為化成縣).⁵⁹ In this example, *long* was replaced by *cheng*. Another county, Langzhou 閬州, was renamed Longzhou 隆州 in 618 but was changed back to Langzhou "in the first year of the Xiantian reign" (先天元年).⁶⁰ The first year of the Xiantian reign was the year in which Tang Xuanzong ascended the throne. In other words, these two places were named upon or shortly after his enthronement. Moreover, *The Jiutangshu* documents more explicit cases of renaming as a consequence of observing the taboo practice. For instance, the county Jicheng 基城, *The Jiutangshu* writes, "was renamed Youchuan in the first year of the Xiantian reign in order to avoid [Tang] Xuanzong's name" (先天元年，改為祐川，避玄宗名。).⁶¹

Names	Replacement
<i>long</i> 隆	<i>xing</i> 興, <i>cheng</i> 成, <i>bu</i> 布, <i>chong</i> 崇
<i>ji</i> 基	<i>ye</i> 業, <i>qi</i> 其, <i>ben</i> 本, <i>zong</i> 宗, <i>zheng</i> 政

Table 4.3 Replacement characters used to taboo Tang Xuanzong's name, *longji*

⁵⁶ Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:3016.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 3018.

⁵⁸ Wang Yankun 王彥坤 2009:129-131, 180-183.

⁵⁹ Liu Xu 劉昫 945/1975:1638.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1672.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1637.

In contrast to this common Tang common practice, neither Christian source avoids Tang Xuanzong's name by resorting to this method. Several characters listed in Table 4.3 can be found in the Christian texts. For example, the character *cheng* 成 occurs four and thirteen times in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* respectively. However, none is a taboo case. In *On One God*, the phrase “*sishi chengsui*” (四时成岁) contains the character *cheng*, meaning that four seasons make up a year.⁶² The use of *cheng* here has nothing to do with the character *long*. The phrase *sishi longsui* 四时隆岁 does not make any sense. I have not come across any other source that has ever used such a phrase.

4.3.3 Long and ji were not deprived of their strokes

Unlike his grandfather Tang Gaozong, Tang Xuanzong seems to have preferred the *quebi* method to implement name taboos. In his reign, he did not restrict but indeed even encouraged the adoption of this method. In *The Tangliudian*, we have a commentary that legitimizes the usage of this method. “Should a state taboo be encountered in the course of writing canons, history and other books or in compiling and recording past events, the characters shall not adopt their orthodox forms” (若寫經史羣書及撰錄舊事，其文有犯國諱者，皆為字不成。).⁶³

In Tang sources, *long* 隆 was often deprived of its long vertical line – for instance,  used in P.2602, a Dunhuang Taoist source dated 718. The same can be said of the character *ji*. In P.2607, a manuscript in which the scribe copied the other sources, the vertical line of the lower part of *ji* 基 has been removed – .⁶⁴

In neither of the two Christian manuscripts was this method used. The word *long* does not occur. The character *ji* appears in *On One God*. As attested by its three occurrences  (c148w14),  (c149w6) and  (c154w16), none deviates from the normal.⁶⁵ All are in the orthodox form, obviously differing from the above *quebi* example. They are not instances of a taboo.

4.3.4 Discussion

⁶² Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:364, Col.162.

⁶³ Li Linfu 李林甫 738/1992:113.

⁶⁴ These two examples are cited from Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永(2010:248-249).

⁶⁵ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:363.

This analysis reveals that, on the face of it, the scribe of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* would seem to have shown Tang Xuanzong scant respect. His lack of deference was in not employing any of the common methods to avoid Tang Xuanzong's name. As attested by the occurrences of *ji*, had he written at the time the scribe would undoubtedly have committed Tang Xuanzong grave offense. Furthermore, given that it was during Tang Taizong's reign that the Tang imperial patronage, mentioned in Chapter 1, was resumed and Tang Christians were slowly recovering from the setbacks inflicted on them after the rise of Empress Wu in the late seventh century, this violation of the taboo tradition is a very strong clue that the two Christian manuscripts were not made either in or soon after Tang Xuanzong's forty-three-year reign.

4.4 Conclusion

The findings of this chapter demonstrate that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* deviate significantly from the general practice adopted by the Chinese between the 650s and the 750s. Irrefutably, neither of the two manuscripts embraced the demanding practice of avoiding the names of Tang Gaozong, Empress Wu and Tang Xuanzong. Evidence endorsing this finding is that not a single Christian source employed the new forms, introduced by Empress Wu in the course of the period 689-697. The only possible usage of the new form 惡 was just another scribal error of 惡.

Furthermore, considering the setbacks that beset the Tang church between the 690s and the 710s and the disastrous rebellion that ravaged Tang China between 755 and 763 raise serious doubts about the possibility of making religious manuscripts before peace had been restored. That is, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were unlikely to have been produced during the second period of the Tang Church, the theme of this chapter. The most likely possibility is that they were made in a later period and this is the matter to be examined in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 An alternative chronology

To take the period of the Late Tang and Five Dynasties [*circa* 800-the 950s] as the watershed and divide the history of Chinese largely into two phases, ancient and modern, does not appear to be unreasonable. (以晚唐五代為界，把漢語的歷史分成古代漢語和近代漢語兩個大的階段是比較合適的。)

— Lü Shuxiang 呂叔湘 (1904-1998)¹

In the medieval period [*circa* Tang China], the Chinese passive underwent new changes. The “*bei*” construction became more popular. (到了中古時期，被動式又有了新的發展。不僅“被”字句用得更普遍了。)

— Wang Li 王力 (1922-1996)²

One of the grammatical features that distinguish modern [post-tenth century] Chinese from ancient Chinese is: the order “*bei*ZV [*bei* + agent + verb]” represents the majority of the occurrences of the *bei* construction. (近代漢語語法區別於古代漢語的特點之一便是：被字句以“被ZV”式為主。)

— Yuan Bin 袁賓³

Historical linguists have already established that the Chinese language underwent significant changes in Tang China. By the ninth century or the putative disappearance period of the Tang church, Chinese morphology, semantics and syntax, as noted by Lü Shuxiang, had diverged to such a degree that the language had entered a new phase of development and already differed widely from the Chinese spoken and written by the Tang people when Aluoben arrived in Xi'an in 635. One grammatical aspect in particular, how the Chinese passive was conveyed, had been subjected to profound and profuse changes. In fact, as Wang Li and Yuan Bin have indicated, these changes are so conspicuous that they can be used to periodize the historical development of Chinese. This nugget of information tells us that the changes in the Chinese passive can shed light on the time at which a text was or was not composed.

On this premise the present chapter therefore relies on the usage of the Chinese passive in the texts under examination in order to determine the chronology of the manuscripts, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. The chapter commences by arguing the general premise that

¹ Lü Shuxiang 呂叔湘 1985:1. How Chinese should be periodized is hotly debated among scholars. Some experts suggest that Old Chinese ended in the early Tang period, but many others are inclined to take the late Tang or the Tang collapse as the initial period of Modern Chinese. According to Dan Xu (2006:xii), for instance, the Chinese language is divided into four periods: (i) Old Chinese (eleventh century BCE – first century CE), (ii) Middle Chinese (first – tenth century), (iii) Modern Chinese (tenth – twentieth century), (iv) Contemporary Chinese (from twentieth century up to the present). For more details, see Guo Xiliang 郭錫良 (2013), Zhang Yuping 張玉萍 (1995), Jiang Jicheng 蔣冀騁 (1991, 1990), and Jiang Shaoyu 蔣紹愚 (1990:1-2).

² Wang Li 王力 2004:492.

³ Yuan Bin 袁賓 1989:54.

the historical changes in the Chinese passive can be utilized to date old texts. After this had been established on a sound basis, the chapter examines the sorts of passives used in the two Christian texts in greater detail, demonstrating that they were newly composed no earlier than the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period. Finally, the chapter concludes that the two Christian manuscripts were produced somewhere between the ninth century and the early eleventh century and it once again underlines the point that these surviving manuscripts are authentic ancient documents.

5.1 Relying on the Chinese passive to date sources

Four clear features of the Chinese passive demonstrate that its use in a text is a pointer to certain developments in this grammatical form and therefore to the dating of the sources.

The first linguistic feature that needs making clear is that Chinese conveys passivity by employing passive markers, a fact that underlines that the Chinese passive was not an open system.⁴ Throughout history only a few characters have been used as passive markers. These fourteen characters are those most often discussed: *yu* 於, *wei* 為, *jian* 見, *bei* 被, *shou* 受, *de* 得, *yu* 遇, *zao* 遭, *huo* 獲, *meng* 蒙, *chi* 吃, *jiao* 教, *rang* 讓 and *gei* 給.⁵ However, not all these markers are uncontroversial. For example, Yuan Bin has recently contended that *meng* is a marker and it had been used since the first century.⁶ In view of the historical period covered in this research, this chapter will discuss only the first four markers because, as will be shown, they were introduced long before the advent of Tang China and their status is beyond doubt.

The second trait of the Chinese passive is that there is a clear rise-and-fall curve in all markers. As will be shown, the markers listed above were not all introduced at the same time. *Yu* is the oldest and was used more than 3,000 years ago. *Wei* and *jian* emerged about 2,500 years ago. *Bei* was first used in the second century. Moreover, the markers were not used in the same period with equal frequency. In most delineated periods, one or two markers were preferred by Chinese users. At a particular time, they completely overshadowed other markers, especially the newly introduced characters. Gradually, as a new marker rose, it would dislodge its predecessor, becoming the dominant passive device. Understandably, this rise

⁴ This chapter does not tackle the passive without markers or the implicit passive. Examples are *keshi* 可食, that means edible or can be eaten, and *kejian* 可見, that means discernible or can be seen — for the latter, see Example 2 below. In addition, the sequence of the active can also express the passive. *Handan wei* 邯鄲圍 literally reads that Handan city besieges. Contextually, however, it means that Handan city is besieged. For more details about these passives, see Wang Li 王力 (2004:484), Wang Canlong 王燦龍 (1998), Lu Jianming 陸儉明 (2004), and Liu Guangming 劉光明 (2000).

⁵ For more details and a sound list of these markers, see Zhang Yanjun 張延俊 (2010:49, 60-63).

⁶ Yuan Bin 袁賓 2005.

was a very slow process and took a few centuries to complete. Nevertheless, in retrospect the process is clear, and the rise and subsequent fall of the markers is undeniable. As demonstrated below, the rise-fall curve has been mapped out by historical linguists.

The third peculiarity is that most passive sentences are clear and easily identifiable. A passive construction always contains a marker and a verb, that is, the basic core of the construction, into which other elements can be inserted and attached. Moreover, the structural or syntactic sequence of a passive construction is very strict and never changes. In the *yu* construction, as will be shown, the verb precedes the marker *yu*; but in the other three markers, the marker precedes the verb. There are no exceptions. This grammatical structure allows the passive construction to be sliced into several analytical segments that can be expressed in formulas for the purpose of generalization. Therefore, similar examples are labeled and dealt with under one formula in order to delve into the order of a certain passive marker. For instance, the above quoted formula 'PbeiAV' is just one of the common *bei* passive orders, that will be discussed in a moment. Unfortunately so far the abbreviations contained in these formulas have not been standardized. Therefore to avoid confusion, this chapter uses the full description, 'patient + *bei* + agent + verb'.

The fourth characteristic is that, in spite of the abovementioned stable structural sequence, as hinted above the passive construction or use of a certain marker did evolve as time lapsed. As will be explained, the construction invariably passed through a process from simplicity to complexity. When a marker was first used, its examples were simple and short, often containing a marker and a verb. Gradually, more elements were added, and the construction grew longer and more complex. In addition, as is the case in any language, new passive orders were occasionally introduced as time went on. That is, the complex orders emerged after the simple ones, but importantly not all the orders appeared in the same period.

The presence of these four features means that the passive in a text contains information about the time of the composition of the text. The more frequently a text employs a particular marker, the more likely it is that the text was created around the time at which that marker became the dominant passive device. The more complex the passive orders are, the later the source was probably made. When a new order is used in a text, this text had obviously been created after the emergence of that new order. By matching the passive use of a text with the spectrum of the evolution of the passive and investigating the appearance of the particular orders, therefore, we can determine to which period the text might belong.

The Chinese passive has already been successfully used to date sources, for instance, the dating of the work *The Qujingshihua* 取經詩話, an important picaresque novel based on Xuanzang's seventh-century pilgrimage to India. Scholars have believed that this text was composed between the eighth and the tenth century. However, relying on the Chinese passive use Yuan Bin has demonstrated that this text was created in a much later period. In his analysis, he explores the *bei* construction and pays particular attention to the simplicity-complexity process, or 'the *bei* construction with multiple clauses' in his terminology below. He found that the use of complex *bei* orders increased as time progressed. Before the seventh century, not a single *bei* construction was of the complex order. By the tenth century, the complex order represented 3 percent of *bei* passive examples. From the eleventh century and for centuries thereafter, the occurrence frequency of the complex order — the D value as Yuan Bin calls it — continued to rise: 29 percent in the thirteenth century and 30 percent in the fifteenth century. Comparing the specific use of the complex orders in *The Qujingshihua* (35 percent) with the general spectrum mentioned above, Yuan Bin concludes that "this source was created around the Yuan dynasty (*circa* thirteenth-fourteenth centuries)." (該書寫定於元代前後（約十三、十四世紀）。)⁷ As his argument is so inspiring, this research quotes it at length:⁸

In the historical development of the *bei* construction, as illustrated in Table 2 [that is summarized in this research in the paragraph above], the "*bei* construction with multiple clauses" gradually emerged and was used with growing frequency. The period from the Late Tang and Five Dynasties to the Yuan dynasty [ninth-thirteenth century] witnessed a conspicuous increase in the use of this particular type. In other words, this use [of the "*bei* construction with multiple clauses"] seems to be a fairly reliable method to determine the date of the *bei* construction contained in the vernacular sources of this period [ninth-thirteenth century]. *The Qujingshihua* employs six examples of the "*bei* construction with multiple clauses". The D value [...] is 35 percent. This is close to the usage in *The Pinghua* and novels written in the Yuan and Ming dynasties [thirteenth-seventeenth century]. We know that Dunhuang vernacular works and Chan Buddhist collections are the most important [...] vernacular sources of the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period. As revealed by the data, however, the D value of these [Dunhuang] works is only between 3 and 5 percent. Therefore, it is very hard to believe that authors in this period [ninth-tenth century] could have used these *bei* passives [with multiple clauses] as frequently these occur in *The Qujingshihua* with the D value reaching as high as 35 percent. (從表二可以看出，在被字句發展歷史中，“多小句被字句”由無至有，從少到多，而晚唐五代至元代，正是此種句型的使用頻率明顯上升的時期。也就是說，辨別該時期口語文獻裡被字句的寫作時代，使用此項指標頗為合適。《取經詩話》中有 6 例“多小句被字句”[...]，D 值為 35%，與元代和明代上半葉的平話、小說作品接近。我們知道敦煌俗文學作品和禪家語錄乃是晚唐五代時期最重要 [...] 的口語文獻，而調查統計結果，其 D 值僅在 3% 至 5% 之間。很難想像，該時代的作者能寫出《取經詩話》中的這批被字句——D 值高達 35%。)

⁷ Yuan Bin 袁賓 2000:545.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 548.

5.2 An overview of the passive use in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

All four characters, *yu*, *jian*, *wei* and *bei*, can be found in both *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* but only *wei* and *bei* are used as passive markers. As this observed use provides critical information about the creation of the two Christian texts, these uses will be examined in detail in Sections 5.3 and 5.4.

5.2.1 Occurrences of *yu*, *wei* and *jian*

Yu, *jian*, *wei*, and *bei* are very common characters. As do many other Chinese sources, the two Christian texts use all of them — see Table 5.1.

Sources	Characters			
	Occurrences			
<i>The Messiah Sutra</i>	15	33	35	2
<i>On One God</i>	77	86	29	9

Table 5.1 Occurrences of *yu*, *jian*, *wei* and *bei* in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

However, in these texts *yu* and *jian* are not used as a passive marker. In every instance, *yu* is a preposition, usually translated into English as: to, and in. *Jian* often functions as the verb, see. Occasionally, it is also used to replace the character *xian* 現, that means appear. See Examples 1 and 2, that are taken from *On One God*.⁹

- 1) 可 見 者 / 不 可 見 者 並 是 一 神 所 造
ke jian zhe bu ke jian zhe bingshi yishen suozao
Seeable and non-seeable are all created by one god.
- 2) 共 惡 魔 一 處 於 地 獄 中 永 不 得 出
gong emo yichu yu diyuzhong yongbudechu
 stay with demons in Hell and cannot ever get out

Turning to *wei*, it is frequently used as a verb (do or be) as well as a preposition (for or to). In Example 3 from *On One God*, however, *wei* is a passive marker, and the order is ‘*wei* + agent + verb’.¹⁰ This is the only clear *wei* passive occurrence that I was able to identify.

⁹ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:350 (Cols.3-4), 386 (Col.404). I have tried my best to avoid using the English passive. Sadly, it is impossible to avoid the use of English passive sentences altogether. Therefore, this chapter underlines the Chinese passive parts that are being discussed. Hopefully, this technical solution will help to distinguish the questioning passive of the original Chinese from the passive of the English translations. Accordingly, the chapter re-typesets the original Chinese sentences so that the underlined parts in the originals, transcriptions and translations can easily be identified. In the transcriptions, the column breaking (/) is not indicated.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 366 (Col.178).

- 3) 是以 須知 名字 為 人 論說
shiyi xuzhi mingzi wei ren lunshuo
wei agent verb

So, [one shall] know that the [demon's] name is talked about by people.

5.2.2 Occurrences of *bei*

The character *bei* is used eleven times in total. Two examples are from *The Messiah Sutra*:¹¹

- 4) 眾生 自 被 誑惑 乃 將 金 造象[像]
zhongsheng zi bei kuanghuo nai jiang jin zaoxiang
People were hoaxed by [pagans?], and therefore they used gold to create statutes.

- 5) 被 鬼者 趁/ 鬼
bei [?] guizhe chen gui
[As for converts? who] are possessed by [suffer?] ghosts, the ghosts are cast out.

The other nine examples are found in *On One God*. Note that Example 12 uses *bei* twice.¹²

- 6) 欲作舍 [如] 基腳/不着地 被 風 懸吹 將去 如 舍腳牢 風 亦不能 懸/吹 得
yuzuoshe [ru] jijiao buzhaodi bei feng xuanchui jiangqu ru shejiaolao feng yibuneng xuanchui de
When a house is built, [if] the foundations do not touch the ground, it will be blown away by wind;
if the house foundations are solid, the wind cannot blow it away.

- 7) 被 惡魔 迷惑 未得/曉中事
bei emo mihuo weidexiaozhongshi
[People] are confused by demons and do not know the truth.

- 8) 喻如 將 性兒子/ 被破[迫?] 充 賊
yuru jiang xingerzi bei po chong zei
Just like [forcing?] one's own son to become a thief.

- 9) 不周遍 却 被 嗔責
buzhoubian que bei chenze
As not everything has been properly considered, [he] is criticized by [the other people].

- 10) 若已 [是] 被 執捉 配與 法家/ 子 [仔] 細 勘問 從 初 [樹]上 懸高
ruoshi bei zhizhuo peiyu fajia zixi kanwen cong shushang xuangao
Should he be caught by [other people], the person will be taken to the court to be thoroughly
interrogated and will be hanged high from the [tree].

- 11) 靈/柩 勿 從 被 偷 將去
lingjiu wu cong bei tou jiangqu
The coffin should not be stolen by [anyone].

- 12) 從 石忽人 被 煞 餘百姓 並 被/ 抄掠 將去 從[此] 散普[布] 天下
cong shihuren bei sha yubaixing bing bei chaolue jiangqu cong[ci] sanbu tianxia

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 391 (Col.48), 400 (Cols.143-144).

¹² *Ibid.*, 363-364 (Cols.154-156), 365 (Cols.168-169), 369 (Col.218), 371 (Cols.233), 373 (Cols.259-260), 376 (Cols.290-291), 381 (Cols.346-347), 382 (Col.362).

After the Jews were killed by [Titus?], the rest of the [Jewish] people were removed by [Titus?], dispersing all over the world ever since.

- 13) 亦有 波斯 少许人 被 迷惑 行与 魔鬼 等
yiyou bosi shaoxuren bei mihuo xingyu emogui deng
 Moreover, there are a few Persians who are confused by [demons] and act like the demons.

Of these occurrences, all are clear with the exception of Examples 5 and 8. Example 5 adopts the old use of *bei*, ‘be covered by’. This old use will be discussed in Section 5.3.1. In Example 8, the phrase *beipo* 被破 is gibberish. Given the context, it seems that *po* 破, that means break, can be replaced by *po* 迫, that means force. Therefore, Example 8 can be translated as ‘It is similar to one’s own son being forced to be a thief’. Nevertheless, since these two examples are ambiguous, they will not be used in this dissertation. Consequently, this dissertation has established nine *bei* constructions in the two Christian texts discussed.

5.2.3 Two remarks about the passives in the Christian texts

This overview raises two matters that require a detailed explanation.

Firstly, *bei* is the dominant passive marker used in them. In total, this research has discovered ten indisputable passive constructions. The markers *yu* and *jian* do not occur; the marker *wei* is used only once. The marker *bei* is employed nine times. In the matter of the dating of the Christian texts, we shall show what period this particular frequency of use best matches in the evolution spectrum of Chinese passive.

Secondly, not one but three *bei* passive orders of differing levels of complexity are used. As indicated below, the first two orders are ‘*bei* + verb’ and ‘*bei* + agent + verb’. They are simple. In contrast, the third, ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ is fairly complex — *jiangqu* is an element that can be taken as a suffix. As will be demonstrated below, the first two orders are common whereas the last one is very rare and so far scholars have paid it scant attention. To determine the time of the creation of the two Christian texts, we need to have a clear understanding of these orders, particularly their emergence and the evolution of their use.

The ‘*bei* + verb’ order:

- | | | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 4) <u>被</u> 誑惑 | 9) <u>被</u> 嗔責 | 10) <u>被</u> 執捉 | 12) <u>被</u> 煞 | 13) <u>被</u> 迷惑 |
| <u>bei</u> hoax | <u>bei</u> criticize | <u>bei</u> catch | <u>bei</u> kill | <u>bei</u> confuse |
| hoaxed <u>by</u> | criticized <u>by</u> | caught <u>by</u> | killed <u>by</u> | confused <u>by</u> |

The ‘*bei* + agent + verb’ order:

- 7) 被 惡魔 迷惑
bei demons confuse
 confused by demons

The '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order:

- 6) 被 風 懸吹 將去
bei wind blow *jiangqu*
 blown away *jiangqu* by wind
- 11) 被 偷 將去
bei steal *jiangqu*
 stolen *jiangqu* by
- 12) 被 抄掠 將去
bei plunder *jiangqu*
 plundered *jiangqu* by

5.3 The dominance of *bei* and the date of the two Christian texts

To get a better idea of the general dominance of *bei*, this section will trace the rise of *bei* that commenced in the second century. As a consequence of this study, this section will point out that *bei* probably did not rise as quickly in the seventh century as has been commonly thought. On the basis of the evidence available, it will argue that the increase in its use became more marked in the eighth century and thereafter. The section will demonstrate that it was in the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties periods that *bei* eventually ejected *yu*, *wei*, and *jian* and became the dominant marker. On account of the particular frequency of the use of *bei* in the two Christian texts, they could not have been written before *bei* became the dominant marker.

5.3.1 The emergence of *bei* in the pre-Qin period

The *bei* construction emerged before 221 BCE. Its earliest order was '*bei* + verb', the first order observed in the two Christian texts.

14) The '*bei* + verb' order

國 一日 被 攻 (戰國策)
guo yiri bei gong
bei verb
 If the country is attacked one day by [enemies]

In this period, its use was very limited and hence examples are rare. *Bei* occurs much less frequently than any of the other three markers. As scholarly research has revealed, the dominant passive marker at that time was *yu*, first used in the oldest Chinese writings, the oracle bone script 甲骨文. Among 714 passive sentences before 221 BCE, the *yu*, *wei*, *jian*

and *bei* constructions represent 62.6, 24.8, 11.6 and 1 percent of use respectively. The common orders of the other three markers are:¹³

15) The 'verb + *yu* + agent' order

勞力者 治 於 人
laolizhe zhi yu ren
 verb *yu* agent

Those who labor with their physical strength are ruled by others.

16) The '*wei* + verb' order

管 蔡 為 戮
guan cai wei lu
wei verb

Guan and Cai were killed by [Zhougong].

17) The '*wei* + agent + verb' order

而 身 為 宋國 笑
er shen wei songguo xiao
wei agent verb

So he was ridiculed by the Song people.

18) The '*jian* + verb' order

比干 見 剗
bigan jian ku
jian verb

Bigan was ripped apart by [the King].

Pertinently, these *bei* examples are not explicit and are open to different grammatical interpretations. Wang Li argues that the '*bei* + verb' order (including Example 5 above found in *The Messiah Sutra*) adopted the very old use of *bei*, a verb, that means receive or suffer. Examples are:¹⁴

19) 被 其利
bei *qili*
receive his benefits

20) 被 八創
bei *bachuang*
receive eight wounds

21) 被 兵之患
bei *bingzhihuan*
receive war perils

22) 被 眾口之譖
bei *zhongkouzhizen*
receive people's slander

The difficulty in determining whether or not these examples are *bei* passive constructions also lies in how the elements should be understood in their relationship to *bei*. Paul A. Bennett suggests that "that so many Archaic words could function as either nouns or verbs means the part of speech of the element after *bei* is unclear."¹⁵ The post-*bei* constituents in Examples 14, 19-22, he argues, appear to be nominal as well as verbal. For example, *gong* in Example 14

¹³ Cao Fengxia 曹鳳霞 2012:154. Cao Fengxia examined the oracle bones, the metal inscriptions as well as fourteen sources. These sources, according to their traditional chronologies, are *Laozi* 老子, *Lunyu* 論語, *Guoyu* 國語, *Sunbin bingfa* 孫臏兵法, *Chunqiu zuoshizhuan* 春秋左氏傳 (Example 16), *Mozi* 墨子, *Guanzi* 管子, *Mengzi* 孟子 (Example 15), *Zhuangzi* 莊子, *Xunzi* 荀子 (Example 18), *Yanzi chunqiu* 晏子春秋, *Hanfeizi* 韓非子 (Example 17), *Liji* 禮記 and *Zhanguoce* 戰國策.

¹⁴ Wang Li 王力 2004:497-498. Example 19 is used in *Mozi*, Examples 20 and 21 in *Zhanguoce*, and Example 22 in *Hanfeizi*. In the last three cases, *bei* can also all equally be interpreted as suffer.

¹⁵ Paul A. Bennett 1981:75, original underline.

can be taken as a noun, attack. Therefore, Example 14 “could be translated as ‘if one day the state receives an attack’”.¹⁶

5.3.2 The rise of *bei* in the Han and Six-Dynasties period

The Han and Six-Dynasties period is an interesting stage in the history of the development of the Chinese passive. The *yu* construction began lose ground fairly rapidly. By the seventh century, it was rarely used. The *wei* construction became very common instead. After the first century, the ‘*wei* + agent + *suo* + verb’ order alone (Example 23) was used much more frequently than all the other passive orders combined. The position of the *jian* construction remained stable.

Meanwhile, the *bei* construction began to be used with growing frequency. The *bei* examples are clear. The basic order ‘*bei* + verb’ (Example 24) is frequently found. At this time, the *bei* construction grew more complex. New orders began to emerge. For instance, ‘*bei* + agent + verb’, the second order that appears in the two Christian sources, was introduced. Its first use is attested in Example 25, found in a petition submitted to the throne by Cai Yong 蔡邕 (133-192CE).¹⁷ However, at this stage examples of this new order amount to only a handful. Tang Yuming contends that none of thirteen texts of the Han dynasty used the ‘*bei* + agent + verb’ order; among the 509 *bei* examples collected from eleven sources dating to the Six Dynasties, only thirty-five were used with the agent.¹⁸ This suggests that this new order remained marginal until well toward the end of the sixth century.

23) The ‘*wei* + agent + *suo* + verb’ order

為 兒女子 所 詐
wei ernüzi suo zha
wei agent *suo* verb
 [I] was cheated by children and women.

24) The ‘*bei* + verb’ order

忠 而 被 謗
zhong er bei bang
bei verb
 [He] was loyal and yet was slandered by [others].

25) The ‘*bei* + agent + verb’ order

臣 被 尚書 召問
chen bei shangshu zhaowen
bei agent verb
 I was summoned and interrogated by the minister.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Examples 23-25 are cited from Wang Li 王力 (2004:491, 492, 494). Examples 23 and 24 occurs in *The Shiji* 史記.

¹⁸ Tang Yuming 唐鈺明 2002:281.

As quantitative surveys have demonstrated, this general development was a fairly conspicuous feature in both Buddhist texts translated after the advent of Buddhism in the second half of the first century and in indigenous Chinese works — like the above canons, annals, philosophical works and political essays.¹⁹ In the indigenous Chinese works, the ranking of the four markers is: *wei*, *jian*, *bei* and *yu*. Initially the frequency was only sketchily abstracted in modest surveys conducted by scholars like Tang Yuming who examined sources word by word in the 1980s.²⁰ Latterly, it has been confirmed and placed on a much more secure footing by computer-assisted studies, like Cao Fengxia's comprehensive doctoral research.

Cao Fengxia divides this span into four periods, the Western Han, the Eastern Han, the Wei-Jin period and the Northern and Southern dynasties and examines twenty-two sources in total. Surveying the occurrence of each marker in different periods, she finds that the occurrence frequency of each marker in different periods varies markedly. The proportion of the *yu* construction falls from 37, 16, 8 to 3 percent of the total passive constructions. The percentage of the *wei* construction rises from 38, 60, 57 to 54 percent; the ratio of the *jian* construction does not fluctuate very much and remains modest (23, 20, 24 and 30 percent). Pertinently the portion of the *bei* construction increases from 2, 4, 11 to 13 percent.²¹

In the translated Buddhist sutras, the ranking is: *wei*, *bei*, *jian* and *yu*. According to An Junli's research, for which he examined 452 Buddhist texts composed (translated) up to the year 589, *bei* was the second main passive device. An Junli writes:²²

From Chinese Buddhist sources made from the Eastern Han to the Six Dynasties, we have collected 31 occurrences of “*yu*”, 831 examples of “*jian*”, 2,971 examples of “*wei*” and 1,498

¹⁹ The first known translator is An Shigao 安世高, a Parthian missionary who arrived in Luoyang in 148. For more detail, see Erik Zürcher (2007:32-34).

²⁰ Tang Yuming's study on the Chinese passive has been fairly influential and has frequently been quoted by scholars like Chao Li (2007). All his papers were recently republished. Note that Tang Yuming also examined a few Chinese Buddhist texts. For more details, see Tang Yuming 唐鈺明 (2002:251-304).

²¹ According to Cao Fengxia's division of Chinese, the Western Han belongs to the Archaic Chinese. But her division does not impact on the analysis of the evolution of the Chinese passive. Moreover, Cao Fengxia offers a convenient summary of each period. For the numbers, see Cao Fengxia 曹鳳霞 2012:82, 91-92, 121,140. In addition, the twenty-two sources are The *Shiji* 史記, The *Xinshu* 新書, The *Huainanzi* 淮南子, The *Yantielun* 鹽鐵論, The *Xinxu* 新序 (the Western Han); The *Wuyue chunqiu* 吳越春秋, The *Hanshu* 漢書, The *Lunheng* 論衡, The *Qianfulun* 潛夫論, The *Xinlun* 新論, The *Fengsutongyi* 風俗通義 (the Eastern Han); The *Sanguozhi* 三國志, The *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇, The *Soushenji* 搜神記, The *Xinji souchenji* 新輯搜神記, The *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志 (the Wei-Jin period) and The *Shishuo xinyu* 世說新語, The *Nanqishu* 南齊書, The *Songshu* (Vols. 81-90) 宋書, The *Shuijingzhu* 水經注, The *Yanshi jiaxun* 顏氏家訓 and The *Qimin yaoshu* 齊民要術 (the Northern and Southern Dynasties). The period Cao Fengxia examines extends to Sui China. Nevertheless, as attested by the above sources — The *Qimin yaoshu* was compiled in the first half of the sixth century and she does not investigate the non-Buddhist Chinese sources made in Sui China.

²² An Junli 安俊麗 2010:170. Meanwhile, she (2010:034) claims that there are 377 *jian* passive. I think that 377 is a typographical error. Whatever the case might be, this error does not impact on the analysis.

occurrences of the “*bei*” passive. They represent 0.6, 15.6, 55.7 and 28.1 percent of the overall occurrences respectively. In this period, therefore, the most common marker was “*wei*”, followed by “*bei*” and “*jian*”, and the last one was “*yu*”. 在漢魏六朝漢文佛經中我們蒐集到的標誌被動句分別為“於”字式 31 處、“見”字式 831 處、“為”字式 2971 處、“被”字式 1498 處，分別占總數的 0.6%、15.6%、55.7%、28.1%。所以該時期“為”字式佔有絕對優勢，其次是“被”字式、“見”字式，最少的是“於”字式。

As these two scholarly surveys show, the uses of passive markers in both types of sources were very similar. Despite its slight difference in occurrence, *bei* was clearly finding growing favor. In the non-Buddhist sources, *bei* represented 13 percent of the passive sentences. In the translated Buddhist texts, the rise is more obvious: *bei* was one of the main passive indicators, second only to *wei*.

5.3.3 The dominance of *bei* in the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period

The Sui, Tang, Five-Dynasties and early Song period witnessed dramatic changes in the Chinese passive. As suggested above, *yu* became obsolete. It was only preserved in some proverbs and in the sources written in Classical Chinese. *Wei* and *jian* were both increasingly less used. The use of the order ‘*wei* + agent + *suo* + verb’ shrank so much that it “fell into disuse” by the ninth and tenth centuries.²³

As the other forms were eclipsed, *bei* became ever more common. It “asserts [asserted] itself everywhere since the Tang period.”²⁴ Examples can be found in a range of different styles of writings like annals, poems, essays, translated Buddhist sutras as well as common Buddhist stories. New *bei* orders were also introduced, and one is the third order used in the Christian sources, ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’, that will be discussed in Section 5.4. Moreover, since the ninth century, as observed by scholars like Wang Li and Yuan Bin (who are quoted at the very beginning of this chapter), the increase in the use of the ‘*bei* + agent + verb’ order, that was relatively rare before the seventh century, had been impressive, achieving the position of the most common passive form by the mid-tenth century.²⁵

That is to say, from the seventh century the rise of *bei* and the consequent fall of the other three markers are undeniable. Nevertheless, *bei* probably did not rise either as much or as quickly as has often been suggested. In the seventh century, the growth of *bei* was fairly

²³ Chao Li 2007:106.

²⁴ Alain Peyraube 1989:353.

²⁵ Between the first half of the fifth and the sixth century, according to Yuan Bin 袁賓 (1989:54), less than 30 percent of the *bei* constructions were of the ‘*bei* + agent + verb’ order. By the seventh century and thereafter, more than 50 percent of *bei* cases adopted this order.

negligible. At least, its rise is not conspicuous in works written in Classical Chinese. For instance, the official history of Sui China, *The Suishu* 隋書, submitted to the Tang throne in 636, uses the four markers 558 times. The majority are the *wei* constructions (348), and the dominant passive order was ‘*wei* + agent + *suo* + verb’ (314). The *yu*, *jian* and *bei* passives occur 12, 76 and 122 times respectively. Compared to its sixth-century usage, *bei* had increased only a little bit, representing 21 percent of all passives.²⁶ A similar pattern can also be found in the contemporary Buddhist sources. In Xuanzang's dictation of his own sixteen-year pilgrimage to India edited by his disciple Bianji 辯機 in 646, the *wei* construction occurs fourteen times and the marker *bei* only three times.²⁷ Interestingly, *bei* was being used in some newly translated sutras, albeit on a limited scale, as late as the 660s. In the part of *The Diamond Sutra* translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Xuanzang in 660-663 (about 10,000 Chinese characters), *bei* is conspicuous by its absence.²⁸ This would seem to indicate that the sixth-century trend in the use of the passive markers kept up its momentum well into the seventh century and even in the seventh century the rise of *bei* remained fairly modest.

This situation was to change in the eighth century in which a more clearly discernible increase can be seen. This growth has been quantitatively mapped out by Tang Yuming who has studied three important poets who wrote in that century, Li Bai (701-762), Du Fu (712-770) and Bai Juyi (772-846) — see Table 5.2.²⁹ In the poems of Li Bai and Du Fu, about 40 percent of all passive cases are instances of *bei*. In the works composed by Bai Juyi, *bei* continued to rise, and its growth was more obvious. In Bai Juyi's essays, that contain a fair number of pieces written in the Classical Chinese style, *bei* occurs almost as frequently as *wei*. In Bai Juyi's poems, *bei* was clearly the dominant marker, representing 71 percent of all the passive examples. In all these three authors' poems, *yu*, *jian* and *wei* occur once, ten and thirty-five times respectively in total.³⁰

Toward the end of this period, *bei* unequivocally eclipsed the other three markers. Table 5.2 shows that nine out of ten examples are *bei* constructions. In *The Zutangji* 祖堂集, a collection of the early Chan Buddhists' biographies composed by the two monks, Jing 靜 and Yun 筠, in Quanzhou (a southeastern Chinese port) in 952, *wei* and *bei* were used five and

²⁶ All data about the *Suishu* are cited from Tang Yuming 唐鈺明 (2002:299).

²⁷ Wu Fuxiang 吳福祥 2007:4. This source is *The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions* 大唐西域 and has been mentioned in Footnote 44 of Chapter 3.

²⁸ Of the four markers, Xuanzang relied exclusively on *wei*. Sadly, Peng Jianhua 彭建華 (2012) does not offer the detailed numbers. This sutra is known in Chinese as *The Jingangjing* 金剛經.

²⁹ For the first two lines of Table 5.2, see Cao Fengxia 曹鳳霞 (2012:161). The rest of the data are quoted from Tang Yuming 唐鈺明 (2002:298, 299, 301).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 301.

seventy-three times respectively, and there is not one single occurrence of the *yu* and *jian* constructions. After the tenth century, *bei* maintained its momentum. In *The Gu zunsu yulu* 古尊宿語錄, another Buddhist biography compiled in 1138, *wei* occurs three times but *bei* is found 248 times, representing 98 percent of all passive sentences. *Bei* has retained its predominance to the present day.

5.3.4 Discussions

These findings suggest that the texts, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, cannot have been newly created before *bei* attained its predominance.

The most obvious conclusion is that the two texts were not created by Aluoben in 635. It is now an established fact that the marker *bei* was introduced later than *yu*, *wei* and *jian*. Its use rose steadily from the second century. However, it had still only achieved a modest pace by the seventh century. As suggested by *The Suishu* compiled in 636 and Buddhist sutras translated by Xuanzang around the 650s, the *bei* construction was still not being used in impressive numbers. The *wei* construction still retained its predominance. *Yu* and *jian* were still being used but only on a modest scale. The increase in *bei* was still not marked in the early seventh century. The *bei* constructions at that time represent 21 percent of all passive sentences. As said, a more clearly defined rise in the use of *bei* can be seen only from the eighth century and thereafter.

In glaring contrast, the use of the passive in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* diverges from this common trend. Unlike those early-seventh-century sources that employ many *wei* sentences, a sizeable number of *yu* and *jian* case plus a small number of *bei* passives, the two Christian texts confine themselves almost entirely to the *bei* construction, adopting it almost exclusively as the only passive indicator. Among the ten passive examples analyzed in Section 5.2, only one case is the *wei* construction, and the other nine are *bei* constructions. No instance of the *yu* or *jian* passive occurs. As a non-native Chinese speaker newly arrived in the Tang capital in 635, neither Aluoben, nor indeed his collaborators, can single handedly have almost completely discarded all the other three markers. Moreover, as newcomers in the sophisticated world of Tang culture and literature, they would not have been in a position to introduce the new linguistic practice of relying so heavily on *bei*, a construction that only achieved real currency among Tang Chinese at a later period.

The second relevant point revealed by this analysis is that the two Christian texts cannot really have been created earlier than the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period by which time *bei* had become the dominant passive marker. From the eighth century, as demonstrated in the above, the rise of *bei* is clear cut and irrefutable, and subsequently changes in the Chinese passive become obvious — see Table 5.2. The use of *yu* and *jian* had almost disappeared. *Wei* continued to fall whereas *bei* was making its presence felt everywhere. In poems composed by Li Bai and Du Fu, four out of ten passive constructions contain *bei*. In Bai Juyi's poems, composed two or three generations later than those of Li Bai and Du Fu, *bei* was used much more frequently than *yu*, *jian* and *wei*. Seventy percent of all passive examples are *bei* constructions. Toward the middle of the tenth century, *yu* and *jian* died out, *wei* did still occur sporadically but more than 90 percent of all occurrences use *bei*. By this time *bei* had irrevocably usurped the positions of the other three markers to become the dominant device in the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period. By the early eleventh century, *bei* seems to have become the only passive marker resorted to by Chinese users.

Markers Sources %	<i>Yu</i>	<i>Jian</i>	<i>Wei</i>	<i>Bei</i>	Percentage of <i>bei</i>
Archaic sources (1600BCE - 24CE)	632	367	199	17	1%
Sources (25 - 618)	225	1804	649	471	15%
Suishu 隋書 (636)	12	76	348	122	21%
Li Bai's Poems 李白詩 (701-762)	0	0	6	4	40%
Du Fu's Poems 杜甫詩 (712-770)	0	9	13	14	39%
Bai Juyi's Essays 白居易文 (772-846)	1	5	12	11	38%
Bai Juyi's Poems 白居易詩 (772-846)	1	1	16	44	71%
The two Christian texts (dates to be determined)	0	0	1	9	90%
Zutangji 祖堂集 (952)	0	0	5	73	94%
Gu zunsu yulu 古尊宿語錄 (1138)	0	0	3	248	98%

Table 5.2 Pre-twelfth-century usage of passive markers, *yu*, *jian*, *wei* and *bei*

In view of these data, the use of the passive in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* matches the right end of the spectrum surprisingly well. The proportion of the use of *bei* in the two Christian sources is 90 percent. This percentage is much higher than its use in the poems of

either Li Bai or Du Fu. It also exceeds the passive usage in Bai Juyi's poems and essays, coming close to occurrences of the passive in the mid-tenth century source, *The Zutangji* (94%).

The third important point is that, if we pursue this argument in even greater depth, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* could not have been redactions of earlier texts. From what has been said above, the rise of *bei* was not comet-like but part of a slow process. The evidence shows that this marker became the dominant device around the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period. Given the frequency of its occurrence in the two Christian texts (90 percent), it would have been a very strange exercise had some people deliberately redacted all the original passive sentences that contained the other three markers, *yu*, *wei* and *jian*. In other words, the two Christian sources must have been newly created around the time when *bei* was the dominant marker.

In short, the two Christians texts were not composed before *bei* became the dominant passive marker. This conclusion, especially the theme of the new creation, becomes even more tenable when one looks at the '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order.

5.4 The '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order and the date of the two Christian texts

At the outset, it must be said that the '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order was a rare sequence. Its use was so limited that only two examples (Examples 41 and 42) have been collected from all the pre-eleventh century sources, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, examined above and analyzed by mainstream scholars.³¹ Moreover, the study of these two examples is a very new development. They were first briefly mentioned only after 1990 when Cao Guangshun had investigated the sequence that is commonly transcribed as '*verb* + *jiang* + *qu* / *lai*'.³² To date, this rare passive order has remained almost entirely unknown. In fact, as to be shown, this passive order has not yet even been properly identified, transcribed and generalized.

In its attempts to understand the use of this peculiar order in the two Christian texts, this section has taken advantage of CBETA, a free, open, online database of Chinese Buddhist

³¹ These two examples are cited from Lin Xinping 林新平 (2006:199), Zhang Meilan 張美蘭 (2003:287), Wu Fuxiang 吳福祥 (1996:329), He Leshi 何樂士 (1992a:240, 1992b:160) and Feng Chuntian 馮春田 (1992a: 312).

³² Cao Guangshun 曹廣順 1995:54-55, 1990:132. Cao Guangshun has dealt with only one example, Example 42. In this coalescence, the character *lai* 來 means come. It is an antonym of *qu*, that means go. In the field, these two characters are often taken as deictic directionals. In addition, as discussed below, this common formula should be changed to '*verb* + *jiangqu*' or '*verb* + *jianglai*'. For more details about this coalescence as well as about Cao Guangshun's contribution, see Wei Peiquan 魏培泉 (2013:876), Liu Jian *et al.* 劉堅等 (1992:64-65), and Wu Zhenyu 武振玉 (1991).

canons and sources.³³ It has collected as many examples of the construction as possible, mapping out the path by which this order had developed by the time when the Christian manuscripts were sealed off inside Dunhuang Cave 17. The development of this passive order, this section argues, re-confirms that the two Christian manuscripts were newly created no earlier than the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period.

5.4.1 The pre-seventh-century coalescence between the ‘*bei* + verb’ order and *jiangqu*

Although historically the ‘*bei* + verb’ order had coalesced with the phrase *jiangqu* in the fifth century, pre-seventh-century examples are rare. So far, I have only found two examples in three individual sources, the earliest of which is dated 405.

Example 26 is found in *The Dazhidulun* 大智度論, a 100-roll Buddhist text translated by Kumarajiva 鳩摩羅什 in 402-405. It occurs in a verse consisting of seven characters in each line. This example is also quoted by the third source *The Xiuxi zhiguan zuochan fayao* 修習止觀坐禪法要, composed by a monk called Zhiyi 智顗 in the late sixth century.³⁴

26) 如人 被 縛 將去 殺 災害 垂至 安可眠
 ru ren *bei* fu *jiangqu* sha zaihai chuzhi ankemian
bei verb *jiangqu* verb

If someone is (to be) tied, taken away and killed, how can he sleep when [such as] calamity is imminent?

The second source in which this construction is found is *The Sifenlü* 四分律, a sixty-roll Chinese version of The Dharmaguptaka-vinaya made in 410-412. It uses the coalescence ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ in ten sentences. Although all these sentences are slightly different, they do appear to be variations of one sentence. In particular, all the *bei* constructions look very

³³ This database is maintained by the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Texts Association 中華電子佛典協會, an NGO established in 1998. Its primary source comes from *The Taisho Tripitaka* 大正新脩大藏經, a definitive edition of Chinese Buddhist canons edited by Takakusu Junjiro and others in the 1920s. Thus far, this database has collected 0.2 billion plus characters and keeps expanding by incorporating many other sources including tombstone inscriptions and local gazetteers. For more details, visit its official website: <http://www.cbeta.org/>. Moreover, this section also studies a few examples that I came across when I was reading Chinese vernacular and historical sources in my leisure time.

³⁴ http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T25n1509_017. All the examples collected from the CBETA database are referred by their URLs because the CBETA’s URLs indicate enough biographical information. In the above link, for instance, Example 26 is quoted from Roll 17 of *The Dazhidulun*, a source that is numbered 1509 and contained in Volume 25 of The Taisho Tripitaka. For Zhiyi’s quotation, see http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/zh-cn/T46n1915_001.

similar. All ten occurrences can therefore be as assumed to be one example. For the convenience of further discussions, I quote three sentences.³⁵

27) 若 為 力勢 所 持。 若 被 繫縛 將去。

ruo wei lishi suo chi, ruo bei jifu jiangqu

wei agent suo verb bei verb jiangqu

[He] can be held by the strong, or be tied and taken away by [someone].

28) 若 為 強力 所 持去。 若 被 繫 將去。

ruo wei qiangli suo chiqu, ruo bei ji jiangqu

wei agent suo verb bei verb jiangqu

[He] can be held away by the strong, or be tied and taken away by [someone].

29) 或 為 強力者 將去。 [或] 被 縛 將去。

huo wei qianglizhe jiangqu, [huo] bei fu jiangqu

wei agent verb bei verb jiangqu

[He] can be taken away by the strong, or be tied and taken away by [someone].

These examples show that the ‘*bei* + verb’ passive order was being combined with *jiangqu* before the Tang period. However, none of these instances is of the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order because in each example *jiangqu* is used as a verbal phrase, meaning take (bring) away and is inserted between these two actions. In Examples 27-29, the verbal function of *jiangqu* is highlighted by the context. Comparing the first parts of Examples 28 and 29, for instance, it is easy to see that both parts have the same structure, the above-mentioned ‘*wei* + agent [+ *suo*] + verb’ order, that depicts one and the same event — someone is taken away by strong people. Clearly, the action (take away) is coded by *chiqu* (under-dotted in Example 28) and by *jiangqu* (under-dotted in Example 29). In these examples, *chi*, *chiqu* and *jiangqu* are used interchangeably as synonymous verbal phrases.

Actually, the *bei* construction in all these examples is of the ‘*bei* + verb1 + verb2’ order that contains a fairly common syntactic phenomenon, the serial verb construction, in which two or more verbs or verbal phrases can be strung together in a single clause to indicate a single event and concurrent or causally related events.³⁶ Usually, the serialization follows the time sequence. Verbs are clustered together without any intervening conjunction; for example, tie,

³⁵ This work was compiled Yeshe 耶舍. The three examples are quoted from the pdf version released by CBETA (http://buddhism.lib.ntu.edu.tw/BDLM/sutra/chi_pdf/sutra11/T22n1428.pdf). This pdf version is paginated. The examples are found on pages 151, 200 and 203. The other examples including their page numbers are: 或為強力者所執。或被縛將去。 (P.230); 或為強力者所執。或被縛將去。 (P.231); 若為強力者所執。或被縛將去。 (P.241); 或為強力者所執。或被縛將去。 (P.241); 或為強力者所將去。或被繫閉將去。 (P.264); 或為強力者所執。若被繫縛將去。 (P.272); 若為強力者所執。若被繫縛將去。 (P.272).

³⁶ The verb serialization is found in many languages — e.g., (She will) go get (a taxi). For more detail, see Waltraud Paul (2008), Stephen Matthews (2006), Huei-Ling Lin (2004), and Chan Yin-wa (1997), and Li Yafei (1991).

take away and kill in Example 26. Apart from its use in the *bei* construction, linguists have shown that this verb serialization is also seen in the *wei* and *jian* constructions, and examples of the *wei* and *jian* passive constructions with verb serialization do occasionally occur in Chinese historical annals and translated Buddhist texts made earlier than the Tang period.³⁷

This observation on verb serialization is a prelude to a difficult question: How should these examples be formulated, labeled or transcribed? The general practice is to divide *jiangqu* into *jiang* and *qu* and transcribe this passive order as ‘*bei* + verb + *jiang* + *qu*’, in which *jiang* is taken to be an auxiliary verb and *qu* a directional (complement).³⁸ This segmentation is helpful in understanding the grammaticalization of *jiang* and *qu* — providing an explanation of how *jiang* and *qu* lost their verbal status and were transformed into an auxiliary and a complement.

Nevertheless, considering this analysis of the verb serialization, the common formula ‘*bei* + verb + *jiang* + *qu*’ does not seem to hold water. In all these examples, *jiangqu* is used as one of the serialized verbs to code one of the actions in the whole event. That is say, it is the phrase *jiangqu* combined with the ‘*bei* + verb’ order. It is not the two individual characters, *jiang* and *qu*, that are coalesced with the ‘*bei* + verb’ order. In fact, if we recognize *jiangqu* as two elements (individual characters), not every example makes any sense at all. For instance, *jiangqu* in Example 26 can only be divided as *jiangqu* (Division 1). The other two divisions (Division 2 and Division 3) do not make any sense at all — vertical bars indicate the division.

Division 1: 被 | 縛 | 將去 | 殺
bei fu jiangqu sha
 tie take-away kill

Division 2: *被 | 縛將 | 去殺
bei fujiang qusha
 tie-take away-kill

Division 3: *被 | 縛 | 將 | 去 | 殺
bei fu jiang qu sha
 tie take away kill

Therefore, the phrase *jiangqu* must be seen as one syntactical unit that cannot be divided into ‘*jiang* + *qu*’, even though the phrase consists of the character *jiang* and the character *qu*.

³⁷ For instance, Xiao Lirong 肖麗容 (2012: 43, 44, 56, 64, 65, 70, 72, 76, 84, 87, 89, 93) has collected 59 ‘*jian* + verb1 + verb2’ cases in the historical accounts composed between 25 and 618. For more detail, see also Cao Fengxia 曹鳳霞 (2012:109, 127, 134, 142, 146, 151, 168).

³⁸ For this practice, see Lin Xinping 林新平 (2006:199), Wu Fuxiang 吳福祥 (1996:329), Cao Guangshun 曹廣順 (1995:54-55, 1990:132), and He Leshi 何樂士 (1992b:160).

Consequently, all examples must be transcribed as ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’. In simple words, the coalescence cannot be labeled ‘*bei* + verb + *jiang* + *qu*’ but must be identified as ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’.

5.4.2 Unclear examples in the seventh century

In the seventh century, the ‘*bei* + verb’ order coalesced with *jiangqu* would seem to have been developing into what is called here the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order. Within comparison with the scarce number of the pre-Tang examples, its usage increased and the coalescence became complex. The agent was initially inserted between the marker and the verb – see Examples 30 and 31. At this stage of its development, the phrase *jiangqu* appears to have been losing its verbal status.

However, not everything is yet cut and dried and these seventh-century examples are still unclear. As shown by my punctuation of Example 32, *jiangqu* still retained its primary verbal meaning, and all occurrences, especially Example 31, can be interpreted as the *bei* construction plus serialized verbs. In total, I have found five examples in three sources.

The first source is *The Foshuo tuoluoni ji jing* 佛說陀羅尼集經 translated by the Indian missionary Atigupta 阿地瞿多 in 654, in which *jiangqu* is attached to the *bei* construction twice.³⁹

- 30) 遂 被 鬼神 偷盜 將去
sui bei guishen toudao jiangqu
bei agent verb *jiangqu*
Then, [offerings are] stolen and taken away by the ghosts and gods.

- 31) 被 比止[丘] 擲 將去 枷鎖縛
bei biqu nu jiangqu jiasuofu
bei agent verb *jiangqu* verb
[He is] seized, taken away and bound by shackles by Bhiksu.

The second text is *The Fayuanzhulin* 法苑珠林, a collection of pious Buddhist stories compiled by Shi Daoshi 釋道世 in 668. It produces two examples. One quotes Example 26. The other

³⁹ Example 30: http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T18n0901_008; Example 31: http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T18n0901_010.

(Example 32) is contained in a sentence that recounts Xu Shancai's adventure on his way home in 619:⁴⁰

- 32) 道逢胡賊。 被 捉 將去。 至 幽州 南界 胡賊凶毒所。
dao feng huzei, bei zhuo jiangqu, zhi binzhou nanjie huzeixiongduosuo.
bei verb jiangqu

On the way, [he] came across barbarian bandits, was caught and taken away [by the bandits] to the southern border of Binzhou where their filthy den was located.

This punctuation is that offered by the CBETA database. However, the following new punctuation is equally valid. In this punctuation, *jiangqu* is a verb:

- 道逢胡賊 被 捉 。 將去 至 幽州 南界 胡賊凶毒所。
dao feng huzei bei zhuo, jiangqu zhi binzhou nanjie huzeixiongduosuo.
bei verb, jiangqu

On the way, [he] came across barbarian bandits and was caught [by the bandits]. And [he was] taken away to the southern border of Binzhou where their filthy den was located.

The third source is *The Dasheng xianshi jing* 大乘顯識經 rendered into Chinese by Dipoheluo 地婆訶羅 in 680:⁴¹

- 33) 如 被 劫賊 執捉 將去, 作 如是言
ru bei jiezei zhizhuo jiangqu, zuo rushiyan
bei agent verb jiangqu
If [you are] caught and taken away by robbers, say something like this.

5.4.3 Emergence in the eighth century

As far as can be ascertained from the sources, the '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order first appeared in the eighth century. From five sources below, I have gathered seven occurrences.

The first source is *The Genben shuoyiqieyoubu pinaiye* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶, the Chinese version of The Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya. Although there are three occurrences, they seem to be one usage. I quote all the three occurrences:⁴²

- 34) 見 一大木 被 截 將去
jian yidamu bei jie jiangqu
bei verb jiangqu

⁴⁰ Example 32: http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/ko/T53n2122_065. While quoting Example 26 in Roll 71 (http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/ko/T53n2122_071), this source incorrectly writes *bei* 被 as *bi* 彼: 如人彼[被]縛將去殺.

⁴¹ http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T12n0347_002

⁴² http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T23n1442_002. All the three examples occur in Roll 2.

[He] saw that a huge log had been cut away by [someone].

- 35) 見 一大木 被 截 將去
jian yidamu bei jie jiangqu
bei verb jiangqu

[He] saw that a huge log had been cut away by [someone].

- 36) 遂 被 他人 斬截 將去
sui bei taren zhanjie jiangqu
bei agent verb jiangqu

[The huge log] had been cut away by someone.

The second text is *The Genben shuoyiqieyoubu pinaiye posengshi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶破僧事, The Saṅghabhedavastu of The Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya, that contributes one example:⁴³

- 37) 必 被 國王 盡取 將去
bi bei guowang jinqu jiangqu
bei agent verb jiangqu
[My possessions] all will be taken away by the king.

The third source is *The Genben shuoyiqieyoubu pinaiye yaoshi* 根本說一切有部毘奈耶藥事, The Bhaiṣajya-vastu of The Mūlasarvāstivāda-Vinaya, that contributes one more case:⁴⁴

- 38) 象 被 風 吹 將去
xiang bei feng chui jiangqu
bei agent verb jiangqu
The elephant was blown away by wind.

The fourth text is *The Jingang banruo jing jiyuanji* 金剛般若經集驗記. However, Example 39, like Example 32, is ambiguous.⁴⁵ It can also be interpreted as the ‘*bei* + verb1 + verb2’ order.

- 39) 被 捉 將去。吐蕃鎖著。
bei zhuo jiangqu, tufan suozhe
bei verb jiangqu
[He was] caught by [Tibetans] and taken away by [Tibetans] to Tibet and was locked up.

The fifth source is a petition containing an example:⁴⁶

⁴³ http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T24n1450_013

⁴⁴ http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T24n1448_013

⁴⁵ http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/X87n1629_001

40) 臣 國內 庫藏 珍寶 及 部落 百姓 物 並 被 大食 徵稅 將去
 chen guonei kucang zhenbao ji buluo baixing wu bing bei dashi zhengshui jiangqu
 bei agent verb jiangqu

The valuables in the treasury of my country and the possessions of the tribes and the people, all were levied as taxes by the Arabs.

These examples provide important information that helps in understanding the emergence of the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order.

The first point that should be emphasized is that both the authorships and provenances of these different texts reveal that its use kept rising in an upward curve. All these sources stem from the eighth century. The first three texts belong to a series of Sanskrit Buddhist sutras entitled The Mūlasarvāstivāda. They were brought back to China and were translated in Xi’an and Luoyang by Yi Jing 義淨 (635-713), another eminent Chinese pilgrim who embarked on his journey to India in 671 and finally returned to China in 695.⁴⁷ The very first is dated 703. The other two were made no later than 712 when advancing age prevented Yi Jing from taking on more work.⁴⁸ The fourth source is an anthology of stories collected by pious Buddhist believers. It was written in Xinzhou 梓州 where its author, Meng Xianzhong 孟獻忠, was serving as an official in the southwestern province of Sichuan 四川 in 718. The fifth source is the petition sent by Naluoyan 那羅延, the king of Jumi 俱蜜 (present-day Tadjikistan), who requested the assistance of the Tang court to resist the invading Arabs. This petition was submitted in 719.⁴⁹ The different times and places of production, authors and styles suggest that the order under discussion seems to have been spreading in the eighth century.

Even more importantly, by the eighth century the ‘*bei* + verb’ order combined with *jiangqu* no longer seems to have been constrained by the principle of semantic resemblance, whereas, before this time, the coalescence had unquestionably been governed by this principle. In every clear pre-eighth-century example, all verbs share one same semantic feature: the movement of the hand. The verb *fu* in Example 26 means to tie something with ropes; *jifu* in Example 27 to fasten something with ropes; *toudao* in Example 30 to steal something away; *nuo* in Example 31 to take something in hand; *zhuo* in Example 32 to catch; *zhizhuo* in

⁴⁶ Wang Qinruo 王欽若 1013/1989:4040.

⁴⁷ Tansen Sen 2006:31. Many of Yi Jing’s works can be matched to the Sanskrit originals discovered in India and Central Asia. For more details about Yijing and his works, see South Coblin (1991), and Wang Bangwei 王邦維 (1996).

⁴⁸ Wang Bangwei 王邦維 1996:20, 22, 25.

⁴⁹ Wang Qinruo 王欽若 (1013/1989:4040). It is unknown whether this petition was sent directly from Central Asia or had been drawn up by ambassadors in the Tang capital.

Example 33 to hold in one's hand. In all the examples, *jiangqu* is an action, take away, that also contains the semantic feature, the movement of the hand.

However, by the eighth century this semantic constraint dissipated and seems to have been discarded. Henceforward *jiangqu* could be freely attached to other verbs. With the exception of Example 37 *qu* 取, in which it means get something in hand, all the other verbs in the eighth-century examples do not share the same semantic feature with *jiangqu*. In Examples 34 and 35, *jie* means to chop, an action that also involves the movement of the arm. The same can be said of *zhanjie* in Example 36, that can also be translated as to chop. Examples 38 and 40 are even more convincing illustrations of this semantic freedom. In Example 38, *chui* means to blow. As indicated by this character's right element 口 (mouth), the action, blow, has nothing to do with hand. In Example 40, *zhengshui* means levy tax; the agent is not a human but a government.

Taken as a group, these observations indicate that the '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order underwent significant changes in the eighth century. In comparison with all the earlier examples, as its use expanded, both the agent and the action become more abstract and consequently the range of verbs with which could be used expanded. The phrase *jiangqu* lost its earlier verbal nature. It had become a verbal complement that can be equated with the English particle 'away' and attached to such verbs as break, cast, drop, melt, slip and wither. This use of the '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order only emerged in the eighth century.

5.4.4 Limited use between the ninth century and the eleventh century

As far as my data indicate, the use of the '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' order still remained fairly dormant in the ninth century. Besides the two frequently quoted cases (Examples 41 and 42), I have only been able to find four new cases in three sources created between the ninth century and the eleventh century.

- 41) 窠 被 奪 將去
ke *bei* duo *jiangqu*
bei verb *jiangqu*
[My] nest was snatched away by you.

- 42) 久後 總 被 俗漢 弄 將去 在
jiuhou zong *bei* suhan nong *jiangqu* zai
bei agent verb *jiangqu*
Eventually, all will be fetched away by the vulgar men.

The first source, *The Shimen zijinglu* 釋門自鏡錄, contains one example:⁵⁰

- 43) 羊 即 被 牽 將去
yang ji bei jian jiangqu
bei verb jiangqu
The sheep was pulled away by [the butcher].

The second text, *The Xuansha shibei chanshi guanglu* 玄沙師備禪師廣錄, uses two cases.⁵¹

- 44) 被 他善惡業果 拘 將去
bei tashan'eyeguo ju jiangqu
bei agent verb jiangqu
[You] are seized away by retribution for deeds, good and bad.
- 45) 明朝 後日 盡 被 識情 帶 將去
mingzhao houri jin bei shiqing dai jiangqu
bei agent verb jiangqu
Quickly, all will be taken away by early desires.

The third source, *The Jingdechuandenglü* 景德傳燈錄, quotes Examples 42 and 44 in Rolls 9 and 18 respectively. It also contributes one new example:⁵²

- 46) 恁麼 即 被 生死 拘 將去 也
nenmo ji bei shengsi ju jiangqu ye
bei agent verb jiangqu
So, [you] will be seized away by life and death.

Arguably, the 'bei + verb + jiangqu' order did not enjoy a meteoric rise in terms of frequency after its emergence in the eighth century. However, the small number of the examples does imply that this order did not develop at all. In fact, there were some interesting changes.

Firstly, undoubtedly this passive order was spreading. Example 41 is from Dunhuang manuscript P.2653, in which a swallow reasons with an invading bird to evacuate her nest. The manuscript is one later fragment of *The Yanzifu* 燕子賦, a rhymed work created no earlier than the early eighth century.⁵³ Example 42 is found in the above-mentioned Buddhist source *The Zutangji* made in 952 on the southeastern coast of China. The source, *The Shimen zijinglu*, is a biography of monks composed by Huaixin 懷信 in Xi'an around the 810s. The

⁵⁰ http://www.cbeta.org/result/normal/T51/2083_002.htm.

⁵¹ Examples 44 and 45: http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/X73n1445_003.

⁵² http://tripitaka.cbeta.org/T51n2076_021

⁵³ For dating this source, see Yan Tingliang 顏廷亮 (1998) and Jian Tao 簡濤 (1986).

second text, *The Xuansha shibei chanshi guanglu*, was republished in 1080. It is a collection of stories and catechetical lectures given by Xuansha shibei, a Buddhist master from the southeastern Chinese coastal city of Fuzhou 福州, who died in 908. The last document is one of the primary sources of the history of Chan Buddhism in China. It was compiled by Shi Daoyuan 釋道原 in the eastern Chinese city of Suzhou 苏州 in 1004. In comparison with the eighth-century sources, most of which were produced in the Tang heartlands, these post-eighth-century sources are more interesting because they were made and used over a wider area, one that stretched from the eastern Pacific coasts of China to Central Asian oases. This is an indication that the geographical area over which the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order was spreading and was consequently being used by more people from the ninth century and thereafter.

The second change that meets the eye is that its use was becoming complex. Cases from this period often inserted an agent between the marker *bei* and the verb — see Examples 42, 44, 45 and 46. Even more importantly, abstract concepts could now also be used as the agent. Before the ninth century, the agent, whether explicit or implicit, was either human (like the king in Example 37) or a concrete noun (like the wind in Example 38). Not a single eighth-century example contains an abstract, inanimate concept as the agent. However, in the ninth century, the order did begin to incorporate abstract nouns as agents. In Example 44, humans are restrained by considerations of the retribution that would be incurred by good and bad deeds. In Example 45, humans are being led astray by earthly desires. In Example 46, the agents are life and death. All these abstract concepts are personified and transformed into agents that could initiate an action like humans. This is a new development. It seems that the connection between the verb and *jiangqu* was being less strongly felt in the ninth century than it had been in the eighth century. In fact, as more and more examples could be inserted with an agent, the bond between the verb and *jiangqu* tended to loosen. The phrase *jiangqu* appears to have completely lost its verbal status. It was beginning to sound purely and simply like an ending, whose presence or absence did not impinge on the integrity of the meaning very much.

5.4.5 Discussions

The development of the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order offers further support to the observations made above about the time at which the two Christian texts were created.

The first point that should be emphasized is that history of the emergence of the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order strongly suggests that the two Christian texts were created after the eighth century. As has been demonstrated, this particular passive order did not emerge before the eighth century. The pre-eighth-century examples of the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order were invariably restrained by the principle of the same semantic domain. The verbs all shared one semantic feature, the movement of a hand. For example, *fu* means to tie (using your hands). In essence, these early cases are of the *bei* construction with two or more serialized verbs that indicate a whole process or concurrent events. In the eighth century, this principle was compromised. The semantic restriction was lifted. Verbs that preceded *jiangqu* were no longer required to share the same semantic feature with it — examples are *cui* 吹, that means to blow, and *zhengshui* 徵稅, that means to levy taxes. The phrase *jiangqu* lost its verbal status and was transformed into a functional ending that can be equated to the English particle ‘away’.

Pertinently, all the occurrences in *On One God* do not differ from many post-seventh-century examples, and none resembles a pre-eighth-century example. Take for instance, Example 6, in which *jiangqu* is attached to the verb *chui* 吹. The agent is the wind, and the action (blow) does not share any semantic feature with *jiangqu*. Hence, the principle of one semantic domain has been violated, and *jiangqu* in Example 6 is no longer an independent verb but a verbal ending that can be removed without altering the meaning of the sentence. In other words, Example 6 is not the ‘*bei* + verb1 + verb1’ order but the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order.

The second point that shall be drawn is that the particular use of this rare order is a very strong argument that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not redactions of earlier texts. After its emergence, the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order continued to develop and its use seems to have increased, especially around the early eleventh century. Examples can be found in sources made throughout the whole Tang Empire. However, its use remained fairly limited well up into the twelfth century. Most sources use only one occurrence.

In spite of its limited use, this order does occur three times in *On One God*. All these examples are clear. Given this frequency of occurrence, it would have been strange should an individual have suddenly shown a marked preference for this order, thereby intentionally employing it in *On One God*. It would be an even more extraordinary step to assume that someone deliberately replaced or redacted the original passive sentences inserting this rare order instead. The most plausible explanation of the occurrences of this order in the Christian texts is that it was naturally adopted conforming to the then generally accepted practice of using it.

That is to say, the two Christian texts were not redactions of pre-eighth-century texts. They were newly created texts that were produced at a certain time after the ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order was established in the eighth century.

5.5 Conclusion

These discussions shed great light not only on the dating of the manuscripts, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, but also on their authenticity.

First and foremost, the manuscripts, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, were made between the ninth century and the early eleventh century. As we have stated in the Introduction to this dissertation, it stands to reason that neither manuscript can possibly have been composed before the texts were created. The creation of a text determines the *terminus post quem* of a manuscript. As the two Christian texts were most likely created in the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period by which time *bei* had become the dominant passive marker, we can conclude that the manuscripts must have been produced no earlier than this period. Furthermore, we also claim that the sealing of Dunhuang Cave 17 is the *terminus ante quem* of all the documents. Hence, the Christian manuscripts were created before the early eleventh century.

The second point that should be made is that the use of the Chinese passive is another irrefutable indicator that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not forged by a modern hand.

In the early twentieth century, few Chinese scholars had made any attempt to trace the evolution of the Chinese passive. As a matter of fact, much of our knowledge about the Chinese passive is very new. The historical, descriptive method of studying Chinese was not introduced into China before first-generation scholars like Lü Shuxiang and Wang Li, who are quoted at the opening of this chapter, had completed their education in the West around the 1930s. Systematic descriptions of using the four markers were only undertaken as late as the 1980s, when second-generation scholars like Tang Yuming painstakingly perused ancient Chinese sources word for word. A detailed, synchronic and diachronic study of the rise and fall of all the markers was not produced until recently when computer software enabled scholars to build corpuses and analyze the changes more precisely. Despite these developments, ‘*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*’ order still remains largely unnoticed. It was first reported post-1990. So far, as shown in Section 5.4, only two examples have been analyzed with any

frequency, and this order has not yet even been properly identified. Many examples have not so far been fished out the oceans of sources.

In other words, much of our knowledge about the Chinese passive, particularly how the Chinese passive changed in the period of Tang China, was still a mystery in the early twentieth century. Therefore, no forger at that time could have displayed such outstanding ingenuity that he would have been able to use the four markers exactly as the people in the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period did. It is simply inconceivable that any forger could have been so extremely well read he would have come across, let alone have known how to use, the rare 'bei + verb + *jiangqu*' order.

In sum, the Chinese passive has passed through clearly traceable changes throughout history. These changes are helpful in dating sources. The use of the passive reveals that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* can be shown to be neither redacted early texts nor modern forgeries. Very probably, the texts were newly created not earlier than the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period. In a nutshell, the two Christian manuscripts were not produced before the putative disappearance of the Tang Church.

Admittedly, this dating deviates starkly from the conventional chronology. Nevertheless, it seems even more plausible when one examines the historical presence of Dunhuang Christians that is sketched in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 A documentary history of Dunhuang Christians

The above is the catalogue of the sutras. The headquarters in *Daqin* house 530 *bu* (volumes) of the sutras. All are written in Sanskrit on patra leaves. In the ninth year of the Tang Taizong Emperor, Great Virtue from the Western Region, Aluoben, came to China and submitted a petition in his native tongue. Fang Xuanling and Wei Zheng [two ministers] announced permission for their translation. Later, Great Virtue of Our Teaching, Jingjing was summoned [to translate the sutras] and translated the above 30 *bujian* (rolls). The great majority all remain in their leather cases and are still not translated. (謹案諸經目錄大秦本教經都五百卅部並是貝葉梵音/唐太宗皇帝貞觀九年西域太德僧阿羅本屆于中夏並奏/上本音房玄齡魏徵宣譯奏言後召本教大德僧景淨譯/得已上卅部卷餘大數具在貝皮夾猶未翻譯)

— The colophon of P.3847

Although this colophon of Christian manuscript P.3847 suggests that the Christians in Dunhuang knew about the history and legacy of their Tang ancestors, the historical presence of Dunhuang Christians remains curiously understudied. The reason is twofold. Most importantly, as indicated in the Introduction to this dissertation, the majority of present-day scholars, either implicitly or explicitly, think that Dunhuang was a Chinese town and resort to Dunhuang Christian religious texts to reflect the overall picture of the Christian presence in China proper. The second complication, as discussed below, is that the Dunhuang manuscripts are written in several languages, and some produced in the ninth and the tenth century have only recently been identified by Nicholas Sims-Williams and a few other scholars.

Lately, this gap in knowledge seems to have been recognized by a young Chinese scholar, Wang Lanping. He has gathered the Chinese Christian manuscripts, including a few more Dunhuang Chinese fragments, and has built up a picture of the Christians residing in Dunhuang from the seventh to the early fourteenth century.¹ Unquestionably, his study is a sterling service but Wang Lanping has been influenced by the traditional view of reading the sources, especially *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*. As a consequence, he has excluded the Sogdian and Tibetan manuscripts. The upshot of his choice is that his depiction, the seventh-century presence in particular, is rather inaccurate.

In this chapter, my principal argument is that Dunhuang Christians should be understood in their own right. It is essential that the local presence be properly depicted and analyzed before it can be used as a source to examine the ancient Christians in China. With this idea in mind, I propose to build up a new picture of Dunhuang Christians by undertaking an

¹ Wang Lanping 王蘭平 2016a, 2008.

exhaustive rereading of all the sources. This chapter is not restricted to the Christian manuscripts, religious and non-religious, alone but will also extend its remit to images found in Chinese and non-Chinese texts. For the sake of completeness, it will incorporate the recent archeological discoveries that have failed to attract sufficient attention in the West. On the basis of the sources available, this chapter argues that a seventh-century presence is not confirmed. Its contention is that the presence of Dunhuang Christians began in the eighth century and was continuously maintained well into the early eleventh century.

6.1 The presence in the eighth century

When Christians first arrived in Dunhuang remains unknown. There is every chance that people of this faith were among the merchants who made up the caravans that were passing through this oasis before 635, and that Christians might establish a presence in Dunhuang after the Chinese court officially allowed Aluoben to propagate Christianity in the Tang Empire in 638. However, these assumptions are still imponderables that could later be substantiated by concrete evidence.

By the eighth century, the presence of Christians is unequivocal. Four Chinese manuscripts, Kojima Manuscripts A and B, *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*, are predicated to have been written by Christians in the course of this century. As intimated earlier, I cannot concur with this postulation. Below, I shall demonstrate that the first two, that I shall call Kojima Forgeries A and B, are modern products, before I proceed to argue that the latter two are authentic and were copied between 745 and 786.

6.1.1 Kojima Forgeries A and B

Although Kojima Manuscripts A and B have been seen as evidence of an early Christian presence in Dunhuang ever since their first publication, recently several scholars have adduced arguments that these sources should be counted as twentieth-century forgeries. I agree with the latter and propose to add three more arguments to the exposure of their inauthenticity. I have drawn these from a careful reading of the earliest publications that were already suggesting that the Japanese collector Yasushi Kojima might have been involved in the forgery business.

6.1.1.1 Description and the earliest publications

The Kojima forgeries are two short, signed and dated documents that contain a number of incomplete and illegible characters — for their dates and scribes, see below. The former seems to have survived in a complete form and runs to eighteen columns. In contrast, the latter is very much damaged and only its final thirty columns have survived.

Allegedly, both came from Dunhuang Cave 17 and, after their removal, were obtained by Li Shengduo. Yet for some time they mysteriously remained unknown to the outside world. In the early 1940s, it is said, Yasushi Kojima just happened to find them among the Li family's collections. He purchased them and mailed photos of them to both P.Y. Saeki and Haneda Toru. In gratitude, P.Y. Saeki used Yasushi Kojima's name to designate these sources in 1949 when he first announced their presence by including a preliminary study as an appendix to his book, *Studies of Christianity in China: the Qing Dynasty* 清時代の支那基督教.²

Sadly, the Kojima Forgery A was stolen by an unknown person in 1945 at the time Yasushi Kojima was leaving China at the end of WWII.³ He supposedly took Kojima Forgery B to Japan, where it has remained inaccessible ever since. As far as can be gleaned from the evidence, P.Y. Saeki and Haneda Toru never had the opportunity to examine either of the original manuscripts. The only scholar who has ever had access to the original B manuscript is Kazuo Enoki. "In March 1963, by the courtesy of Professor Tomoo Uchida" of the Doshisha University, Kazuo Enoki wrote in 1964, "I studied the original manuscript" that was "kept in the safe of the Doshisha [Doshisha] University Library in Kyoto".⁴ The rub is that the manuscript examined by Kazuo Enoki exhibits very obvious differences from the photo published by Haneda Toru — see below. Moreover, none of today's researchers like Lin Wushu and Rong Xinjiang (and the present writer) has been able to locate this source.⁵ The original Kojima Forgery B, if such a source exists, was therefore probably also lost.

Despite their chequered history, both sources were introduced to the West by P.Y. Saeki as early as 1951.⁶ As the following colophons state that the two manuscripts were written in the early eighth century in the *Shazhou Daqinsi* (Daqin Monastery in Dunhuang) by two converts, by and large mainstream scholars have accepted P.Y. Saeki's study, and have taken them as genuine Tang sources. The text of the colophons runs as follows:

² P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1979:1-24.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴ Kazuo Enoki 1964:68. This Japanese university is 同志社大学. Its website is <https://www.doshisha.ac.jp>.

⁵ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:157-167. In 2014, I emailed the Library and was told that it does not hold this manuscript.

⁶ P.Y. Saeki 1951: Kojima Manuscript B: 313A-313E (English), 97-100 (Chinese), Plate 14 (photo); Kojima Manuscript A: 314A-314C (English), 100-101 (Chinese), Plate 15 (photo).

Kojima Forgery A: “Suo Yuan, believer from the Shazhou Daqinsi, copied and taught how to chant [it] on the second day of the fifth month in the eighth year of the Kaiyuan reign (720)” (沙州大秦寺法徒索元/定傳寫教讀/開元八年五月二日);

Kojima Forgery B: “On the twenty-sixth day of the tenth month in the fifth year of the Kaiyuan reign (717), the believer Zhang Ju copied [it] in the Shazhou Daqinsi” (開元五年十月廿六日法徒張駒/傳寫于沙州大秦寺).

6.1.1.2 Convincing arguments for forgery

Lately, Li Wushu, Rong Xinjiang and Chen Huaiyu have rigorously investigated the authenticity of the Kojima manuscripts and convincingly concluded that the two documents were forged by unknown Chinese dealers in the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ As indicated by their following summary, their arguments range from more practical aspects like the initial collection, the publication and theology to more esoteric issues like the key theological terms employed.

In the first place, the information about their whereabouts before they were purchased is not accurate. P.Y. Saeki, who based himself on information supplied by Yasushi Kojima’ himself, said that the manuscripts were found among Li Shengduo’s Dunhuang collections and were purchased by Yasushi Kojima in “1943”.⁸ The snag is that other evidence indicates that Li Shengduo knew nothing about the two sources. He neither catalogued these two manuscripts nor disclosed the slightest indication that they had ever been in his possession. In the 1930s, Li Shengduo sold his collections not once but twice. Neither of these two manuscripts appears either in the auction lists published by the *Central News Weekly* 中央時事周報 (15 and 21 December, 1935) or in the influential Chinese journal *Xuegu* 學觚 (1936).

The second piece of damning evidence is that all the photos of the manuscripts we know today were those published by P.Y. Saeki and Haneda Toru. However the photos released of Kojima Forgery B plainly exhibit differences — see Figs. 6.1 and 6.2. In the photo in Haneda Toru’s article, attached to the right edge of Kojima Forgery B is a slip of paper that will be discussed below.⁹ In P.Y. Saeki’s photos published in 1949, 1951 and 1955, no such slip is

⁷ Chen Huaiyu 陳懷宇 1997; Lin Wushu 林悟殊 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 1992. The latter two scholars’ original article in Chinese (1996) has been translated into English and was published in *China Archaeology and Art Digest*. The Chinese version of their article to which I refer has been republished by Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:156-174).

⁸ P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1979:1.

⁹ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1951: Plate 2.

visible.¹⁰ Between the left edge of the photo and the first column of the manuscript, occupied by the slip in Haneda Toru's photo, is only an empty space.



Figure 6.1 Haneda Toru's Photo of Kojima Forgery B



Figure 6.2 P.Y. Saeki's Photo of Kojima Forgery B

The third issue is that, contrary to certain claims, there are several sound reasons to assume that the slip was not added by Li Shengduo himself. The text on the slip is: "[This is] the Sutra of the Origin of the Origins of Jingjiao, thirty columns dated to the *Kaiyuan* reign. This precious rarity is mounted and was discovered by me. Unquestionably, [it is] priceless" (景教宣元至本經卅行開元年號/此稀珍品乃裱經背者余所發現/至足寶貴也).¹¹ Cogently, this 'Li Shengduo' did not adhere to the common practice followed when writing a Chinese commentary. Time-honored tradition allows that a comment like this can be jotted down on

¹⁰ P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1955: Plate 1; 1979:16. See also P.Y. Saeki (1951: Plate 14).

¹¹ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1951:10.

the source itself, even though the course of the process might render some of the original characters illegible. If a separate slip is inserted, it will never be left loose but glued to the manuscript. Even more remarkably, the handwriting on the slip (including the seal) is not Li Shengduo's personal calligraphy. To cap the whole improbable story, Kazuo Enoki, who examined the original manuscript in 1963, says that by the time he looked at the manuscript the slip had mysteriously been lost.¹²

The fourth reason to pause and look before one leaps is that the textual deviations are conspicuous. Kojima Forgeries A and B differ from other Christian sources above all in terms of their application of some key theological terms like Messiah and Alaha. Even more problematic is their use of the appellation referring to the Christian church buildings, *Daqinsi*. According to their colophons, there can be little doubt that at least one *Daqinsi*, if not two, had been constructed in Dunhuang in the 710s – 720s. The fly in the ointment is that this use antedates all the other sources, both Christian and Chinese, most importantly the Tang edict, that, as said in Chapter 1, ordered that the name of the Christian church be changed from *Bosisi* to *Daqinsi* in 745. The purport of this edict contains a strong suggestion that, prior to 745, throughout the Tang Empire any Christian church building had been designated *Bosisi*. Had this not been the case, there would have been no reason to promote the appellation *Daqinsi* and order the abandonment of *Bosisi*.

6.1.1.3 Three more arguments in support of the forgery claim

In light of these puzzling inconsistencies, the forgery claim is already a very strong one. However, three more arguments that have so far remained unnoticed by others will be adduced in this section.

The first of these reasons is that their authenticity has remained controversial since the early publication. Although P.Y. Saeki confidently identified the Kojima manuscripts as the genuine sources in 1949, Haneda already expressed some concerns about their authenticity in 1951. His suspicion was mainly aroused by the anachronistic use of the above-mentioned term *Daqinsi*. Sadly, Haneda did not pursue this matter further, and his voice was ignored by mainstream scholars.¹³

The second reason that arouses disquiet is that exactly when P.Y. Saeki was first apprised of (the photos of) the manuscripts from Yashushi Kojima remains up in the air. In 1949, he

¹² Kazuo Enoki 1964:68.

¹³ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1951:9-11.

announced that the photos had been sent to him at “the end of the same year” (同年末, 1943) in which Yashushi Kojima had bought the two manuscripts.¹⁴ In 1951, he changed his story, claiming that the photos “*came into my hands in the year 1947*”.¹⁵ In 1955, he changed his story yet again, declaring that Yashushi Kojima had obtained the manuscripts in 1944, “the nineteenth year of the Shōwa reign” (昭和十九年).¹⁶ Furthermore, as Haneda Toru admitted that he received the photo from Yashushi Kojima in “1945”, P.Y. Saeki’s inconsistency is far from reassuring.¹⁷ So far, I have not found any clue that might help to find a way out of this confusion.

The third piece of evidence is the mystery that enshrouds the Japanese collector Yashushi Kojima. In their discussions of the forging the two sources, as said the above, scholars have focused their attention on putative elusive Chinese forgers. This is as it may be, but in order to discover more about the forgery issue, perhaps the best way ahead would be to examine the figure of Yashushi Kojima more closely, because he was involved more deeply than any other player in this game. Strictly speaking, Yashushi Kojima is the person who initiated the research by fishing these two sources out of Li Shengduo’s collections and later sending the photos to P.Y. Saeki and Haneda Toru.

At this point, we seem to run up against a brick wall as it is an uphill battle to turn up any concrete evidence about this elusive person. P.Y. Saeki and Haneda Toru said very little about him, in spite of the fact they both mention Yashushi Kojima in passing, saying that he was a friend. Although P.Y. Saeki does offer a few more clues than Haneda Toru in his acknowledgments, these are scattered throughout his books and when gathered together still do provide any convincing evidence. What P.Y. Saeki’s remarks can be added up to is that Yashushi Kojima was his “*friend then in China*” who had spent “many years” (多年) in the northern Chinese city Tianjin 天津, where he met the Li family from whom he purchased the sources.¹⁸ The only other fact about this Japanese collector that can be gleaned from P.Y. Saeki is that he left Tianjin to return to Japan in September 1945.¹⁹ At this point the sources of information dry up. Any personal information about Yashushi Kojima — like profession, family, social status or any details of the transaction — like the payment and the contact — is shrouded in obscurity.

¹⁴ P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1979:1-2, 15.

¹⁵ P.Y. Saeki 1951:313A, original italics.

¹⁶ P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1955:54.

¹⁷ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1951:1.

¹⁸ P.Y. Saeki 1951:313A, original italics; P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1955:54.

¹⁹ P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1979:2.

The strangest part of this mystery is that Yashushi Kojima's actions are inexplicable. As remarked above, Yashushi Kojima sent photos that are obviously different to P.Y. Saeki and Haneda Toru at more or less the same time. Oddly, he did not inform the one recipient that the photos had also been sent to the other. Haneda Toru had absolutely no idea that P.Y. Saeki had received the photos. In fact, in 1951 when he learnt that P.Y. Saeki had first published the sources (in 1949), Haneda Toru seems to have been surprised. He took pains to stress that he had received the photos in 1945 and had already made a preliminary study the results about which he later delivered in a speech in the Kyoto Branch of the Institute of Eastern Culture 東方學會京都支部 in 1950.²⁰ Meanwhile, Haneda Toru decided to edit his old speech notes and publish them in the journal *Tohogaku* 東方學, in spite of the fact that he was just recovering from an illness and candidly admitted that some parts would demand "revision" (補正).²¹

On the grounds of all the cumulative evidence, it seems a reasonable assumption that the dated Kojima manuscripts are not eighth-century sources but the early-twentieth-century forgeries. Although there is still no solid proof for this inference, Yashushi Kojima seems to have been directly engaged in the forging of the two manuscripts. Even if he was not the mastermind behind the whole project, he does at least seem to have been more deeply involved than anyone else.

6.1.2 Two other eighth-century Christian manuscripts: *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*

The Mysterious Bliss Sutra (catalogue number, 羽 013) and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* (catalogue number, 羽 431) are believed to have been written by Jingjing who oversaw the erection of the Xi'an Stele in 781. However, neither source bears an author's name and both are undated. I cannot verify the authorship although I agree with the chronology in general. Taking into account the to-be-discussed clues, I have tried to narrow this dating down, proposing that the two manuscripts were copied sometime between 745 and 786. Hence these two manuscripts suggest that Christians might have already established themselves in Dunhuang by the second half of the eighth-century.

6.1.2.1 Description and the earliest publications

²⁰ Haneda Toru 羽田亨 1951:1.

²¹ *Ibid.*

The Mysterious Bliss Sutra is a long roll of 159 columns, measuring 26.2 centimeters in width and 282.7 centimeters in length.²² The manuscript is in a good condition and has survived almost complete. Only the lower parts of the first ten columns have been broken off.

As the name indicates, this text extols the bliss of believing in Christianity. It appears to have been catechetical material to explain the underlying theology but its purpose was also to win more converts. Besides its borrowing of Buddhist terms, this source has also adopted the Buddhist style of writing a sacred text. The disciples like Simon (岑穩) sit around their teacher the Messiah (彌施訶), asking a series of questions.²³ In His turn, the Messiah replies at length and teaches how bliss can be attained.

The first English translation, prepared by P.Y. Saeki in 1934, was published with Chinese texts that were based on the earliest version edited by Haneda Toru in 1929.²⁴ As Lin Wushu points out, Haneda Toru had made a number of errors, and P.Y. Saeki compounded these by adding some so-called missing characters and by incorrectly breaking the Chinese up into the “one hundred and eighty-eight columns” of which this source has long been said to consist.²⁵ As the photos of the complete manuscript were finally released for the first time in 2009, all the English translations can now be updated.²⁶

Like *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra*, *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* consists of a roll of yellowish paper. However it is much shorter than the former as the roll measures 26.5 centimeters by a mere 47.7 centimeters.²⁷ The first surviving twenty-six columns adopt the Buddhist dialogue style in an imagined setting in which Patriarch Jingtong (景通法王) is teaching a group of monks eager for knowledge that all has been created by Alaha (阿羅訶).²⁸

It is worth pointing out that *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* has been misunderstood for some time. Since the publication of Kojima Manuscript B, the two sources have erroneously been associated inextricably with each other and believed to be two parts

²² Takeda Science Foundation 武田科学振興財団 2009:128.

²³ These names occur rather frequently. For the edited Chinese texts, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2011b:314-321).

²⁴ P.Y. Saeki 1951:281-311 (English), 77-95(Chinese), 1934a:105-132. For Haneda Toru's Chinese texts, see Haneda Toru 羽田亨 (1929). A. C. Moule (1930:58) appears to have been the first scholar to introduce *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* to English readers when he mentioned the name of the source in 1930.

²⁵ F.S. Drake 1935:739. For the general critique of the textual inconsistency of transcriptions, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2011b:284-323).

²⁶ For these photos, see Takeda Science Foundation 武田科学振興財団 (2009:128-133). Before 2009, only two photos of this source (the beginning and the end) were available. They were published posthumously by Haneda Toru 羽田亨 in 1958 as Plate 6.

²⁷ For the measurement and photo, see Takeda Science Foundation 武田科学振興財団 2011:396-397.

²⁸ For the original Chinese, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:176, Col.2; 177, Col.18).

of a longer text, whose middle section is missing.²⁹ As Kojima Manuscript B has now been exposed as a forgery, this assumption will have to be abandoned.

6.1.2.2 Authenticity, authorship and chronology

Although both sources are anonymous and undated, there is little doubt that *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* are genuine ancient manuscripts. Information about how they were collected is clear. Their previous owner, Li Shengduo (and his family), not only made notes and affixed several seals on them, and they also granted a number of scholars permission to examine the original manuscripts.³⁰ After he had investigated the original manuscript *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* in 1930, for instance, Chen Yuan copied the first ten columns and sent them to P.Y. Saeki, who published the first English translation in 1934.³¹ In the 1920s-1930s, Haneda Toru, with assistance of several famous scholars including Chen Yuan, visited Li Shengduo and purchased the originals that he took with him to Japan.

Moreover, the authenticity of *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* has now also been attested by the other version carved on the 815 Luoyang Pillar discussed in Chapter 1. Although the Pillar version and the Dunhuang manuscript do contain some minor deviations, their contents match each other almost perfectly. On the basis of these two versions, scholars are now reconstructing a full Tang version.³²

As said, the two manuscripts are now accepted as texts that were created by Jingjing by scholars in the field. P.Y. Saeki, for instance, briefly argues that *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* was made in “750-850”.³³ Recently, Lin Wushu has conducted more detailed textual studies of the theological expressions, transcribed names and other phrases like *Daqin*, and reached the conclusion that *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* could have been translated by

²⁹ P.Y. Saeki 1951:313A-313D; P.Y. Saeki 佐伯好郎 1979:17-22.

³⁰ For more detail, see Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:147-149, 166-170)

³¹ P.Y. Saeki 1934b:133.

³² Nie Zhijun 聶志軍 2010: 020, 360-361; Lin Wushu 林悟殊 and Yin Xiaoping 殷小平 2008:329-335.

³³ P.Y. Saeki 1934a:105. Meanwhile, he (1934b:133) also asserted that *The Sutra of Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* could have been made “between 750-900”. In 1937 (264), he slightly re-phrased his words, claiming that the two sources “must have been composed after 786-788” by Jingjing. But when the dated Kojima Forgery B was found, he completely changed his mind. Believing that *The Sutra of Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* and the Forgery B may belong to one source, he (1951:248-264) argued that *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* might have also been made in the early eighth century by a priest named “Cyriacus”, whose Chinese name is Jilie, a name which appeared in the 781 Xi’an Stele quoted in Section 1.3.2 of Chapter 1. Lately, Hidemi Takahashi (2013:14) has pointed out by P.Y. Saeki was “apparently misled” by the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese name and “Gabriel” shall be the correct interpretation.

Jingjing no later than 781.³⁴ At this juncture, I propose that they were copied at some place between 745 and 786.

On the basis of the evidence of the observance of the name taboo, *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* could have been written no earlier than the reign of Tang Ruizong, who initially ruled as a puppet of Empress Wu in 684–690 and was fully reinstated in 710–712. To avoid Tang Ruizong's name, *dan* 旦, Tang people also tabooed the homophone *dan* 但, often by removing the middle horizontal stroke, 𠂔. This taboo form can be found in F.096, P.3757, S.4642, P.2617, P.2859A and S.692.³⁵ The same form also occurs twice in *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra*: 𠂔 (c53w4) and 𠂔 (c76w10).³⁶

Known historical events also give some clues by which to date *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra*. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Dunhuang was conquered by the Tibetan Empire in 787 and was restored to Tang rule only in 848. Since there would have been no need to observe a name taboo under Tibetan rule, it seems probable that *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* was composed before 787.

Turning to *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*, it would seem that this was composed after 745. The strongest evidence for this assertion is the use of the phrase, *Daqin* 大秦, promoted by the 745 Tang edict promulgating the name change. Should it have been made earlier than 745, this source might have used *Bosi* rather than *Daqin*.

Lastly, as “the handwriting is the same” (同一手筆), the two sources seem to be made by one and the same person between 745 and 786, a time at which this area was under the control of the Tang.³⁷

6.2 Dunhuang Christians between the ninth century and 907

Between roughly the ninth century and 907 when the Tang court collapsed, the number of Dunhuang Christians seems to have increased slightly. Not only were they producing theological texts and artistic works, they are also known to have maintained contacts with the outside world. All these sources are discussed below.

³⁴ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:183-185.

³⁵ The first three are quoted from Huang Zheng 黄征 (2005:75-76). The latter three are examined by Dou Huaiyong 竇懷永 (2010:244-245).

³⁶ These two forms are copied from the original manuscript (Takeda Science Foundation 武田科学振興財団 2009:130). In the manuscript, *dan* 但 occurs five times. The other three occurrences – c58w15, c105w13, c113w1 – are in the orthodox form. I am grateful to Prof. Hidemi Takahashi, Prof. Samuel N.C. Lieu and Dr. Chen Huaiyu for assisting me in having these scanned pages.

³⁷ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:177.

6.2.1 Christian Manuscripts

A few fragments, private (secular) and public (religious), seem to have been made by the Dunhuang Christians in this period. Two (Or.8212/86, Or.8212/182) have been identified. Three more pieces (Or.8212/89, Pelliot Chinois 2782, and Pelliot Chinois 3134) still await confirmation. All these five sources are written in Sogdian. None uses either Chinese or Turkish. I shall introduce them one by one.

6.2.1.1 Two confirmed Sogdian fragments: Or.8212/86 and Or.8212/182

The Sogdian part of Or.8212/86 (Fig. 6.3) has been translated into French by Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton as F text. These two scholars report that this fragment is a business letter drafted in either the eighth or the first half of the ninth century.³⁸ The drafter was a priest named Sargi (Sergius) in Line 1, and the recipient was El Bars who, as suggested by his name in Line 2, appears to have been a Turk.³⁹ The interesting part is the postscript that was written jumbled up with the Chinese text on the other side of the fragment. In this postscript, in Line 20 (verso) Sargi urged El Bars to take a “monk” named David under his wing.⁴⁰ Although it is impossible to know where either El Bars or David resided, this source suggests that the Dunhuang Christians, ecclesiastics as well laymen, maintained contacts with other Christians.



Recto



Verso

Figure 6.3 Or.8212/86: a business letter drafted by Sargi

³⁸ Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton 1990:51-61. The Chinese is the Buddhist text, *The Da banniepan jing houfen* 大般涅槃經後分, that was translated in the middle of the seventh century. The plate is downloaded from http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=1554442813;recnum=12446;index=1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 52 F1.1, F1.2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 60 F20.1.

Or.8212/182 (Fig. 6.4, cursive Sogdian, verso blank) appears to be the “only” non-Chinese Christian religious source that was found by Aurel Stein among the manuscripts in Dunhuang Cave 17.⁴¹ It has been introduced as Fragment 18 by Nicholas Sims-Williams who identified it as “a Christian divination text” on the basis of its style and content.⁴² More specifically, this fragment is an oracular text of a type that was used throughout Central Asia to predict the supplicant’s fate. Although it is a fragment, the gum along the bottom margin suggests that it was once piece of a longer roll consulted by Dunhuang Christians. It is neither signed nor dated. Nicholas Sims-Williams suggests that it is a ninth-to-tenth-century fragment.⁴³

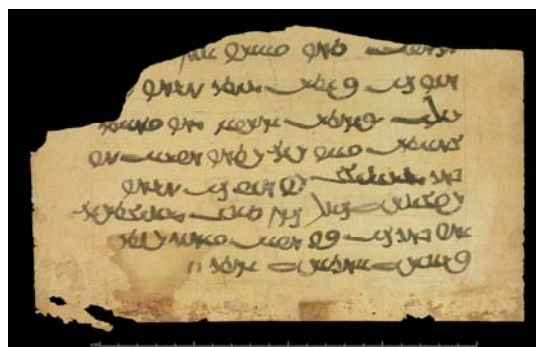


Figure 6.4 Or.8212/182: a Christian divination text

6.2.1.2 Three possible fragments: Or.8212/89, Pelliot Chinois 2782, and Pelliot Chinois 3134

The following are three possible Christian fragments. They all contain some clues to their origin, for instance, Christian names. However the information is insufficient, and the interpretation is inconclusive. At this moment, it is impossible to confirm that they are Christian sources.

Or.8212/89 (Fig. 6.5) is a long Sogdian letter introduced by Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton as Text G.⁴⁴ The recto has 21 lines; the verso 3. Nicholas Sims-Williams claims that several typically Christian names suggest that this letter was either written by a Christian or at least sent to a Christian. Firstly, the recipient bears the Syriac name Giwargis (George) in Line 5; secondly, in Line 14 the letter also mentions a priest who has a Sogdian name, Wanu-čor, but bears the Syriac title *reš 'edtā* (the head of the church). Furthermore, there is mention of

⁴¹ Nicholas Sims-Williams 1992b:55. See also Nicholas Sims-Williams (1976:63). The plate is downloaded from http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=1140712710;recnum=2956;index=1.

⁴² Nicholas Sims-Williams 1976:44.

⁴³ An oracle book is known in many languages such as Turkish, Tibetan and Sogdian. For more information including how people used the texts, see Nicholas Sims-Williams (1976:44, 64-65; 1992b:55).

⁴⁴ Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton 1990:63-76. This plate is downloaded from http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=423545377;bst=651;recnum=12630;index=680.

a certain monk whose name might be interpreted as Sogdian (Kwr'k?), Turkish (Küräg?) or Chinese (Guang? 廣/光/曠) in Line 20.⁴⁵



Recto



Verso

Figure 6.5 Or.8212/89: a possible Christian letter

The verso of Pelliot Chinois 3134 (Fig. 6.6) contains 25 lines of a commercial document introduced by Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton as Text A, that was written in “Sogdian or Turkish scripts with the ninth-to-tenth century features” (sogdienne ou ouïgoure aux forms caractéristiques du IX^e-X^e siècle).⁴⁶ The Christian attribution of this document is suggested by the phrase “pr βγ’y n’m” (in the name of God) in Line 7.⁴⁷

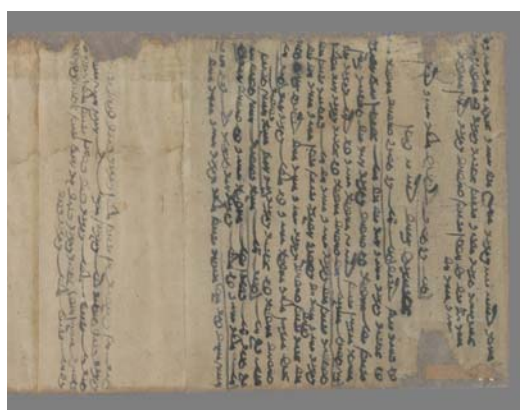


Figure 6.6 Pelliot Chinois 3134: a possible Christian business document

Pelliot Chinois 2782 (Fig. 6.7) has two short Sogdian lines written preceding its Chinese Buddhist text, *The Da banruo boluomiduo jing* 大般若波羅蜜多經. As the Buddhist source

⁴⁵ Nicholas Sims-Williams 1992b:55. See also Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton (1990:68 fnG5.1, 72 fnG14.1, 76 fnG20.2).

⁴⁶ Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton 1990:23. This is downloaded from http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=431976876;recnum=60353;index=4.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

appears to have been made in “the second quarter of the ninth century” (deuxième quart du IX^e siècle), the Sogdian must have been written no earlier than the first half of the ninth century.⁴⁸ Once again, the Christian attribution of this source is indicated by the phrase “pr βγ’γ n’m” (in the name of God) in Line 1.⁴⁹ In Nicholas Sims-Williams and James Hamilton’s study, the Sogdian part is Text D.⁵⁰

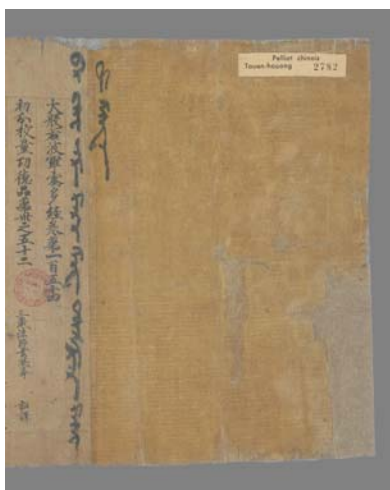


Figure 6.7 Pelliot Chinois 2782: two possible Christian lines

6.2.2 A late-ninth-century Christian painting: Ch. xlix. 001

The figure in Fig.6.8 is depicted standing with its head turned toward to the left. The right arm is raised from the elbow. The left hand, mostly broken away, clasps a long staff close to the breast. It (ink and colors on silk; severely damaged; height: 88.0 centimeters; width: 55.0 centimeters) was originally taken out of Cave 17 by Aurel Stein in 1908 and is now housed in the British Museum (catalogue number: Ch. xlix. 001).⁵¹

Arthur Waley published one of the first complete reproductions in 1925.⁵² In 1937, P.Y. Saeki offered a full-size color version plus a reconstruction intended to show what the original might have looked like, introducing it as a painting made by the Church of the East.⁵³ Roderick

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40. For the plate, visit

http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=432537617;recnum=59938;index=5.

⁵¹ For a detailed description, see M. Aurel Stein (1921:1050-1051). This figure has been has been downloaded from http://idp.bl.uk/database/oo_scroll_h.a4d?uid=3795503310;recnum=40482;index=2.

⁵² Arthur Waley 1925:5.

⁵³ P.Y. Saeki 1951: frontispiece, 409. For the recent publications, see Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams 2004:124, Fig.11; Roman Malek 2002: cover (right); Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit 1999: Plates 24 and 25; K. Parry 1996: Fig.7(b); Roderick Whitfield 1982: Plate 25.

Whitfield, who has examined the narrow flame border of the halo and the configuration of the mouth, argues that “this painting dates from the end of the ninth century.”⁵⁴



Figure 6.8 Ch. xlix. 001: a Christian painting

The identification of the figure (in the painting) remains controversial.⁵⁵ At first glance, the figure very much looks like a bodhisattva. Conspicuously, the raised right hand is held open with the palm uppermost with the thumb resting on the index finger. This hand gesture (the gesture of instruction) appears to be a typically Buddhist *mudra* that can be seen in many figures found in Dunhuang and statues erected in the Chinese central plains.⁵⁶ Moreover, as observed by K. Parry, the halo, the bracelets and the small flowers scattered in the background are also iconographically Buddhist.⁵⁷

Despite the evidence of the Buddhist iconography, the Christian elements feature so prominently they have prompted other scholars to claim that the drawing was a treasure of the Church of the East. I endorse this view and would also like to argue that this painting was

⁵⁴ Roderick Whitfield 1982:322.

⁵⁵ For this conclusion, see also Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams (2004:124), and Arthur Waley (1925).

⁵⁶ Ian Gillman and Hans-Joachim Klimkeit 1999:223.

⁵⁷ K. Parry 1996:160.

most likely made by the Church of the East. I adduce three important reasons for my conclusion.

The first is that the non-Buddhist elements are a significant enough intimation that the painting could not be made by the Chinese Buddhists. The figure's face has non-Far-East Asian features. "The nose is slightly aquiline."⁵⁸ The eyes in particular are not Far-East Asian. Aurel Stein stated that the surviving eye (right) is "blue" rather than black, and it is the "only instance" in his collection.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the figure wears a cross that is "a fairly unambiguous Christian icon."⁶⁰ Aurel Stein firstly observed one cross on the headdress; Arthur Waley saw a second one on the breast and K. Parry has recently found "the cross pattern on the collar".⁶¹ The headdress cross, silhouetted against the black background, is clearly visible. It is resting on an unclear base whose extremities terminate in two small pearls and the apex of the arms that form a triangle is also decorated with a large pearl. Basically, it is a "Maltese cross", a plain cross with four arms ending in eight points used in the Byzantine Roman Empire and from Iraq to India and China.⁶²

The second ground for arguing for a Christian origin is the fact that the crosses are decorated with pearls, a motif that strongly suggests the painting was created by the Church of the East. Regardless of the use of a number of pearls, crosses decorated with pearls have been found from the Euphrates to the Pacific shores of China, and their large quantity indicates that embellishment with pearls was an enduring specific style preferred by the eastern provinces of the Church of the East. In Sasanian Iran, Christians had already been using pearls for this purpose for a long time. On seals dated no later than the sixth century, a cross is often adorned with one, two and sometimes even three round objects.⁶³ In India, Christians also used pearls to decorate the cross. In the seventeenth century, for instance, the Jesuit Álvaro de Semedo noted the round objects on the "extremities" of the cross carved on the newly found Xi'an Stele, and he concluded that this "fashion" was "graved on the Sepulchre of the Apostle S. *Thomas*" in Malabar.⁶⁴ In Central Asia, pearl-encrusted decoration tended to be rather lavish. Not only were the arms set with two or three pearls but the join at the center

⁵⁸ Arthur Waley 1931:82.

⁵⁹ M. Aurel Stein 1921:1050.

⁶⁰ Susan Whitfield and Ursula Sims-Williams 2004:124.

⁶¹ K. Parry 1996:160; Arthur Waley 1925:5; M. Aurel Stein 1921:1050.

⁶² Arthur Waley 1925:5, 1931:82; M. Aurel Stein 1921:1050. As two large leaves arising from the base often flank the cross, this kind of cross is also known as the leaved-cross. For more detail about the leaved-cross, see K. Parry (1996:142-162).

⁶³ For the images of these seals, refer to J.A. Lerner's study (1977: Plate I.3, 4, 5 and 6).

⁶⁴ Álvaro de Semedo 1655:157, original italics. The pearls are so elaborately arranged Álvaro de Semedo believed that the extremities ended in flowers.

was sometimes embellished with more than one round object. On three gravestones found in Kyrgyzstan (Fig.6.9a), Uzbekistan (Fig.6.9c) and Xinjiang (Fig.6.9c), each triangular limb is set with several pearls, and their apexes are all joined by a circle; as attested by Syriac scripts, these stones were undoubtedly erected by the followers of the Church of the East sometime in the thirteenth-to-fourteenth century.⁶⁵

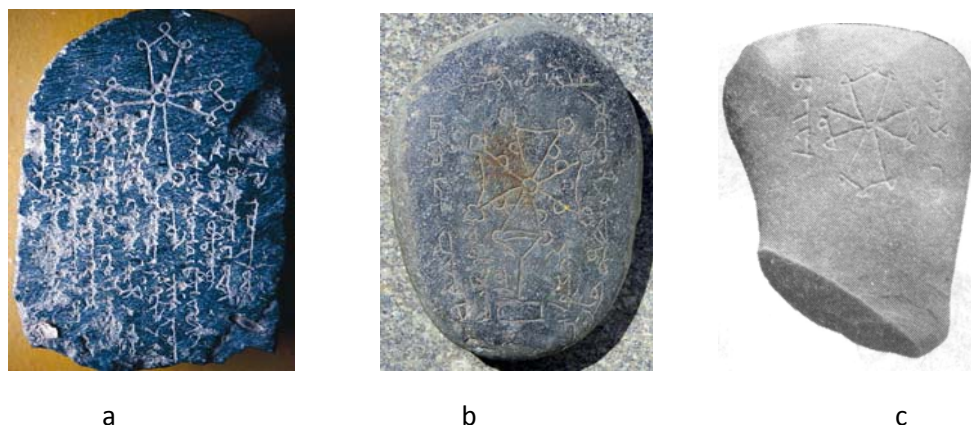


Figure 6.9 Crosses decorated with pearls found in Central Asia

Farther to the East, decoration with pearls was even more lavish. Specifically, the number of pearls increased sharply. In the 781 Xi'an Stele, the cross (Fig.6.10a) is carved with “no less than seventeen circles (one in the middle, one in each angle, and three at the end of each arm) of which eleven contain each a smaller more or less concentric circle, making a total of twenty-eight circles.”⁶⁶ On the recently-discovered Luoyang Pillar erected in 815, the extremities of the two crosses (Figs.6.10b, c) also have three pearls chiseled on them. In particular, the central concentric pearls in Fig.6.10b have also been embellished with so many smaller round objects that it might be impossible to count them all accurately – there are at least nine tiny pearls (my estimation). In the thirteenth and again in the fourteenth century, a cross decorated with pearls was also favored by Christians in China. The cross (Fig.6.10d) unearthed in Quanzhou 泉州, a southeastern port city that flourished between the eleventh

⁶⁵ Fig.6.9a (22x23 centimeters) is the front cover of the book published by Dietmar W. Winkler and Li Tang (2009), and it is dated to the early fourteenth century and housed in the Village Museum Novopokrvka of Kyrgyzstan. Fig.6.9b (28.5x20.5 centimeters, dated 1261/62) has been reexamined by Mark Dickens (2009:29). Fig.6.9c, unknown size, was found by Chinese scholars in Almalik (today's Ili 伊犁, one of the westernmost cities in Xinjiang). According to Huang Wenbi 黄文弼 (1963:558, Plate 3.2), Fig.6.9c can be dated to the fourteenth century. Between 1957 and 1958, Huang Wenbi surveyed several places in Xinjiang. He found a few more of these tombstones that were released in his archeological report published posthumously in 1983 (Plate 8.7). Lately, Fig.6.9c was restudied by Niu Ruji 牛汝極 (2008:57-58).

⁶⁶ A.C. Moule 1931:81.

and the fourteenth century, for instance, is embellished with thirteen pearls, both large and small — the tombstone was dated 1349.⁶⁷

Most importantly, the configuration of the headdress cross in the painting under discussion seems to have been a specific stylistic trait of Christians in ancient China, who had probably been influenced by Buddhist practice. In the Dunhuang painting, the headdress cross rests on a base and is flanked by flowers — neither the base nor the flowers are clearly delineated — and hence it is arranged in almost exactly the same way as all the crosses mentioned above used by the Church of the East in China. On the 781 Xi'an Stele (Fig.6.10a), for instance, the cross is set on a lotus platform (a Buddhist icon) that is flanked by two clouds and two branches bearing leaves. However, this arrangement was not used in Central Asia. As attested by Fig.6.9, as a whole the images on the Central Asian stones are fairly simple; either the cross has no a base, or the base is not surrounded by flowers.

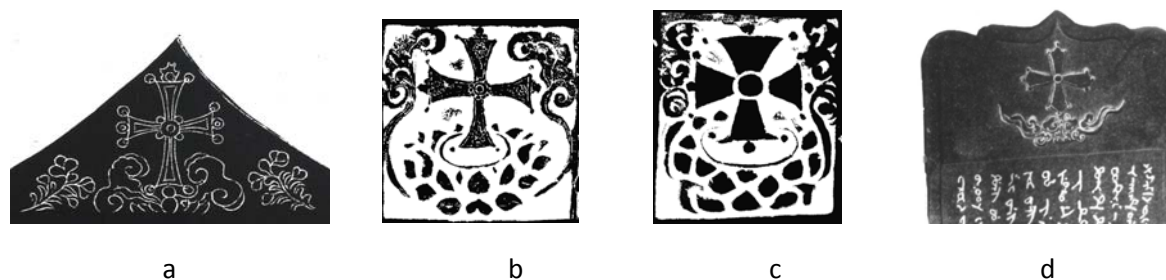


Figure 6.10 Crosses decorated with pearls found in China

6.3 Post-Tang Christians (before the twelfth century)

In stark contrast to the traditional understanding, namely that the Tang church was extinguished after 845, Christians did continue to maintain a presence in Dunhuang between 907 and the seal-off of Cave 17. Their presence is attested by Christian manuscript P.3847 and a bronze cross B105:2. Although many details are as yet unknown on account of the paucity of the evidence, the presence seems to have been modest but the Christian community might still have been using a church building (monastery?). Some Christians at least were fully aware of the legacy of their Tang ancestors. This presence strongly suggests that the Tang church was not wiped out after 845, and the post-Tang church might have been a continuation of its predecessor. The implications of this postulation will be discussed in the Conclusion to this dissertation.

⁶⁷ Fig.6.10a is scanned from the rubbing published by Paul Pelliot (1996: Fig.1). For Figs.6.10b/c, see Ge Chengyong 葛承雍 (2009: Plates 11 and 12). For the photo of Fig.6.10.c, see also Figure 1.3. For Fig.6.10d, see Wu Wenliang 吴文良 (2005:383 Plate B 21.2), K. Parry (1996:Fig.5(c)), and Niu Ruji 牛汝极 (2008:124-127).

6.3.1 Christian manuscript P.3847

P.3847 is a source of great interest. It is the first known and the least contested Christian manuscript. More often than not, it is taken to be a Tang source. On account of the limited information available about it, it is still very hard to verify this claim. Below, I make the case that the manuscript was copied after the Tang court collapsed, and I argue that it must be used to analyze the post-Tang church.

6.3.1.1 Description and the earliest publications

P.3847 is a short roll that is 105 centimeters long and about 27 centimeters wide. It was removed from Dunhuang Cave 17 by Paul Pelliot in 1908. As Paul Pelliot was preoccupied with the overwhelming number of Buddhist texts, its earliest study (editing and translation) was offered by scholars in China (Luo Zhenyu), Japan (P.Y. Saeki) and the West (A.C. Moule and F.S. Drake).⁶⁸

In terms of contents, this manuscript is divided into five parts. Part I (Fig.6.11) consists of only five characters, *san wen meng du zan* 三威蒙度讚 (Praise of the Three Majestics), that is the abridged title of the second part. As these characters are written in the top right corner on the verso of P.3847 and have been very much worn by the teeth of time, this part has not received too much attention.⁶⁹ Judging by the handwriting, it was jotted down by the same hand as that of the person who wrote the recto side of P.3847.

Part II is entitled *The Praise of Jingjiao Three Majestics*. The contents appear to be a translation of the Syriac source *tšbwḥt' d-mīk'*, that is the equivalent of the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* used in the West. Interestingly, the Sogdian version has been identified by Nicholas Sims-Williams who has pieced together several fragments discovered in Turfan. However, this Sogdian text is much shorter but yet closer to the Syriac original, apparently a straight translation, whereas the Chinese edition is an adaptation rather than a translation, and the translators added more sentences, probably to meet the metrical requirements. Given that the Sogdian version was made no earlier than “the eighth century” and P.3847, as will be discussed, was copied after the Tang collapse in 907, this discovery of two versions of a same

⁶⁸ F.S. Drake 1935b; A.C. Moule 1930:52-57; P.Y. Saeki 1916:65-70 (English), 272 (Chinese); Luo Zhenyu 羅振玉 1909:1-3 (45-47). Some of Paul Pelliot's works briefly mention this source (1914:626, 1911:664 fn.3). See also Éd. Chavannes and Paul Pelliot (1911:503). The roll consists of six pieces of paper made of mulberry bark (*chu* 楮). For more detail, see Wu Qiyu 吳其昱 (1986:411) and Lin Wushu 林悟殊 (2003:137-138).

⁶⁹ For instance, P.Y. Saeki (1951:71 (Chinese), 1916:272) does not note this title. Nonetheless, Wu Qiyu 吳其昱 (1986:411) appears to be one of the earliest scholars to have observed this part. But he publishes in Chinese.

source provides a unique opportunity to understand how the religious documents of the Church of the East spread along the Silk Road and to attempt a description of how Christians adapted themselves to the local culture.⁷⁰



Figure 6.11 Verso of P.3847

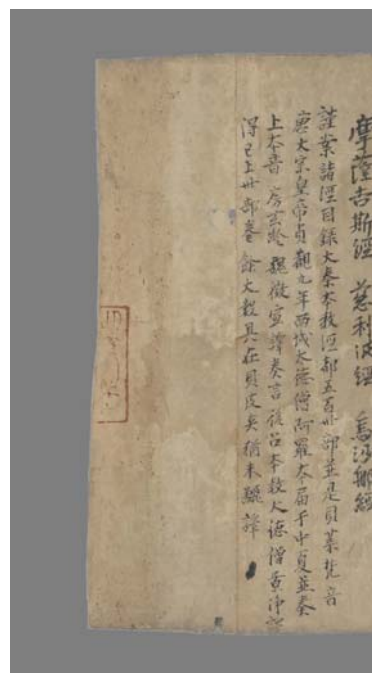


Figure 6.12 Seal and colophon of P.3847

Below Part II is the other religious text, *The Sutra of Reverence*. The text opens with a brief summary of the nature of the Trinity.⁷¹ It then lists thirty-one saints, among them Luke and Mark, and thirty-five titles of documents allegedly used (translated) by the Tang Christians.⁷² P.Y. Saeki claims that *The Sutra of Reverence* is “the Nestorian Diptychs used in China”, dedicated to the living and the dead.⁷³

Part IV (Fig. 6.12) is the colophon quoted at the beginning of this chapter. It was written in small characters below Part III, and runs into four columns. As suggested by its contents, for instance, ‘The above is the catalogue of the sutras’ translated by Aluoben and Jingjing, the colophon was added by the scribe after he had read through (written) Part III. This colophon confirms that some post-Tang Christians in Dunhuang knew about the legacy of the Tang

⁷⁰ Nicholas Sims-Williams 1995:257. According to A.C. Moule (1930:52), A. Mingana seems to have been the first scholar who associated this Chinese source with the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*. However, A.C. Moule did not give the precise reference, and I have not been able to trace A. Mingana’s article. Moreover, there are other Syriac versions. One of the early Syriac copies (dated 1692) is housed in Bibliothèque nationale de France (No. 185) and has been published by Wu Qiyu 吳其昱 (1986:430-432).

⁷¹ For more details, see P.Y. Saeki (1951:273, 277 fn.2), and A.C. Moule (1930:55).

⁷² The names of these saints and the titles of the sources are very difficult to decipher. For the latest study, see Duan Qing 段晴 (2003) and Wu Qiyu 吳其昱 (2001).

⁷³ P.Y. Saeki 1951:277, *sic*.

church, suggesting that they might have been local descendants of the Tang church in Dunhuang.

The final part of P.3847 is a red seal (Fig. 6.12) that measures 5.2 centimeters in height and is attached below Part IV. The greater part of the seal has been broken off. Only the right-hand side has survived. The characters are completely illegible. Setting this seal in the larger context of the use of seals in Dunhuang, especially the use of seals on the Buddhist sutras to indicate the ownership, a number of scholars have speculated about the whole seal and the ownership of P.3847. Wu Qiyu, with whom Lin Wushu agrees, suspects that the right side is “Daqin Monastery” (大秦寺), Chen Huaiyu suggests that the whole seal is “Daqin Monastery in Shazhou [Dunhuang]” (沙州大秦寺) and Wang Lanping proposes that it is the “Sutra Collection Seal of Daqin Monastery” (大秦寺藏經印). Despite this disagreement, all scholars believe that the seal does confirm that Christian monastery was the putative owner of P.3847.⁷⁴ The seal was first observed by Wang Renjun in 1909 but has drawn little attention from the Western scholarship thus far.⁷⁵

6.3.1.2 Dating P.3847

Given that P.3847 is made up of different parts, scholars do not agree with each other on the dating of P.3847. P.Y. Saeki thought that the different parts of P.3847 were created at different times. In his work, he asserts that *The Praise of the Jingjiao Three Majestics* was composed “before 717”, whereas *The Sutra of Reverence* and the colophon were written in “the 10th century”.⁷⁶ Some researchers are adamant that the manuscripts should be dated as a group. A.C. Moule is one who accepts that all the parts were produced at the same time. He alleges: “Internal evidence shows, as will be seen, that the date must be not long before or after the year 800.”⁷⁷ Given the paucity of the information, I do not have the means to delve into the time of creation of its different parts. At this moment, I would argue that the whole manuscript was copied after 907.

⁷⁴ Wang Lanping 王蘭平 2016:32-35; Chen Huaiyu 陳懷宇 2012:47; Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:138; Wu Qiyu 吳其昱 1986:411.

⁷⁵ Wang Renjun 王仁俊 1909:11. I have cited this book from Chen Zuolong 陳祚龍 (1982:347).

⁷⁶ P.Y. Saeki 1951:253, 264. Before the discovery of the Kojima Fogery B, P.Y. Saeki (1931:253, 264) claimed that *The Praise of the Jingjiao Three Majestics* was composed by Jingjing before the erection of the 781 Xi'an Stele and that *The Sutra of Reverence* and the colophon were written in “the 10th century”. See also Footnote 33 of this chapter.

⁷⁷ A.C. Moule (1930:52) does not explicitly reveal the internal evidence.

My reasons for concurring are that all the parts (of course, with the exception of the seal) are written in the same hand. In the past, some scholars have argued that the colophon had been jotted down in another hand.⁷⁸ However, a close examination of the manner in which certain characters are written leads to the irrevocable conclusion that the colophon is the work of the same person who wrote all the other parts.⁷⁹ The difference, as shown by Fig.6.12, is that the colophon was executed in fairly small characters, whereas the other parts were written down using a thicker brush.

The second reason for my agreement is that the clue to the chronology lies in the said colophon, particularly the phrase *Tang Taizong huangdi* 唐太宗皇帝 (Emperor Taizong of the Tang Dynasty). In the imperial China, a phrase of this nature was very rarely used at the time at which that dynasty was still in power. Only a few sources ever placed the name of a dynasty before that of the emperor. Almost without exception the name of the ruling dynasty would have been preceded by some laudatory character like *da* 大 and *ju* 巨. If this were not the case, the dynasty's name would have been replaced by such phrases such as *guochao* 國朝 and *wochao* 我朝. I am not aware of a single Tang text that ever employed the phrase *Tang Taizong huangdi* 唐太宗皇帝. The 781 Xi'an Stele, for instance, scrupulously avoids to use the dynasty's name, Tang. When it does mention the reigning dynasty, it employs an acclamatory character, most frequently, "*jutang*" (巨唐), "*datang*" (大唐); it might also use the phrase "*wotang*" (我唐).⁸⁰ When it refers to the incumbent of the Tang throne, the Stele never places the name Tang in front the name of the emperor. In the case of Tang Taizong, the Stele consistently uses "Taizong" (太宗).⁸¹ In other words, phrases like Tang Taizong emperor and *Tangchao* 唐朝 (the Tang Dynasty) were only commonly used after the Tang dynasty had collapsed. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that P.3847 was copied after 907.

6.3.2 A bronze cross: B105:2

The bronze casting below (Fig.6.13, 6.3 centimeters in diameter, catalogue number B105:2, housed in Dunhuang Academy) is a typical Maltese cross with four arms of equal length.⁸² In each space between the two arms is a bird's head. The cross was broken into two in the lower

⁷⁸ F.S. Drake 1935:297; A.C. Moule 1930:57, Footnote 66.

⁷⁹ Lin Wushu 林悟殊 2003:140.

⁸⁰ These three phrases are found in Cols. 13, 32 and 27 respectively. See Paul Pelliot (1996:Fig.2).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Col.10.

⁸² Fig.6.13a is downloaded from Dunhuang Academy's website, <http://public.dha.ac.cn/content.aspx?id=254220305002>. The rubbing (Fig.6.13b) is the back side of the cross. It is quoted from Peng Jinzhang *et al.* 彭金章等 (2004a:44, Fig.26.2).

section. One bird's head has been slightly damaged. According to the archeological report, this cross was found in 1988 in Cave B105 by the Chinese team led by Peng Jinzhang, who conducted a massive excavation in Dunhuang between 1988 and 1995.⁸³ To the best of my knowledge, this cross has not attracted much attention in the West.

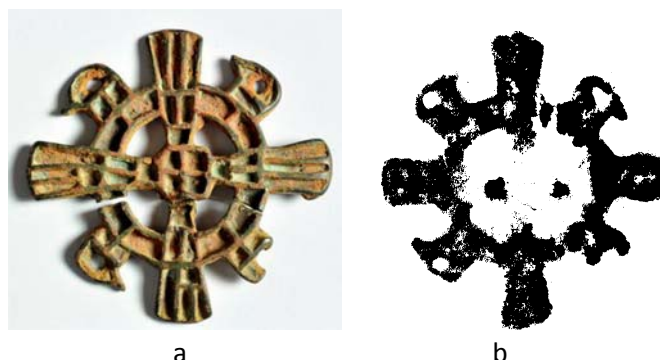


Figure 6.13 The bronze cross unearthed in Dunhuang

Several factors indicate that the cross seems to have been a private badge worn by its owner to display his identity. Firstly, the birds' eyes and the elaborate hollow segments indicate that the cross was once luxuriously decorated. Secondly, its obverse, as shown in the rubbing (Fig.6.13b), has two small projections that resemble pins to which a clasp would have been attached. Lastly, Cave B105 is a hollowed out tomb (瘞窟).⁸⁴ In this cave, the archeologists have found human skulls, jaws, pelvises and limb bones that belonged to three individuals: one male who probably died aged fifty, one female who was between fifty and fifty-five at the time of her decease and another female who was forty-five at her death.⁸⁵

Datewise, the Chinese coins suggest that the cross was buried before the twelfth century. In total, Cave B105 has yielded seven copper coins, of which six are well preserved and one severely damaged. They are two *Kaiyuantongbao* 開元通寶, Tang coins first put into circulation in 621 but reminted many times throughout the Tang Dynasty, and four Song coins: one *Xiangfutongbao* 祥符通寶 cast in 1008-1017, one *Jiayoutongbao* 嘉祐通寶 minted in 1056-1063, one *Zhipingyuanbao* 治平元寶 issued in 1064-1067 and one *Shaoshengyuanbao* 紹聖元寶 introduced in 1094-1098.⁸⁶ As Cave B105 was not disturbed before the excavation

⁸³ Peng Jinzhang 彭金章 2013:52-54.

⁸⁴ Peng Jinzhang *et al.* 彭金章等 2004a:45.

⁸⁵ Peng Jinzhang *et al.* 彭金章等 2004a:43. The examination of the skulls indicates that one of the females was a Mongolian. For the examination report, see Pan Qifeng 潘其風 (2004b:484). For the photos of the excavation site, see Peng Jinzhang *et al.* 彭金章等 (2004a: Plate 14, Frames 3-6).

⁸⁶ For the rubbings and catalogue numbers, see Peng Jinzhang *et al.* 彭金章等 (2004a:44). For the different times of minting *Kaiyuantongbao* coins, see Yang Xinmin 楊心璿 (2015:18-31), Feng Xinbin 馮馨彬 and Feng Minjie 馮明傑 (2011), and Xu Diankui 徐殿魁 (1991).

and has not yielded any other later coins, the *Shaoshengyuanbao* can be taken as solid evidence that the cross was used before 1094-1098.

6.4 Christians in Chinese and Tibetan sources

Lately scholars have found a number of Chinese and Tibetan Dunhuang manuscripts that also contain interesting information about Christians. They either mention Christianity by name or have sketches of crosses drawn on them, suggesting that the local people seemed aware of the presence of Christians. These sources offer a unique chance to understand the Dunhuang Christian community from another point of view. They tell us how non-Christians reacted to Christians and are a very good source for attesting the existence of Christians in Dunhuang. Below, I shall discuss the appellations collectively and then introduce the sketches of crosses.

6.4.1 Five appellations relating to Christianity

Thus far, five appellations have been found: *Mishihe* 彌施訶, *Bosifo* 波斯佛, *Bosi(jiao?)* 波斯(教?), *Bosiseng* 波斯僧 and *I si Myi si ha* (the Tibetan transcription of Jesus Messiah). In their contexts, and also attested by the use in the above-mentioned Chinese sources, these appellations all relate to Christianity.

6.4.1.1 *Mishihe* 彌施訶

In the Chinese sources, *Mishihe* 彌施訶 is associated with one of the many ‘heresies’ in the West and is used to refer to Christianity. Chronologically, the earliest usage can be traced to *The Laozi huahu jing* 老子化胡經. This source recounts that Laozi, the legendary founder of Daoism, rode a blue ox as he traveled to the West where he converted ‘barbarians’ who indulged in ninety-six heresies. In S.6963v, the only extant fragment of the second roll of *The Laozi huahu jing*, *Mishihe* is the fiftieth heresy and recounts stories of many ghosts and gods:⁸⁷

The fiftieth heresy is named Mishihe (Messiah). It recognizes 1,200 ghosts and gods. They enter into human bodies and excite the five desires. [The teaching] accounts killing sinful and claims that it can govern all heretics. Anyone who practices it for a long time will be seduced by the heresy. (第五十外道名彌施訶有一千二百/鬼神以為眷屬入人身中若行五欲說煞生得罪/能治眾邪久事之者令入邪道)

⁸⁷ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 2008:114. There are a few more fragments of *The Laozi huahu jing* — like S.1857, P.2007, P.3404 and P.2004, but these fragments do not mention the Messiah. See also Liu Yi 劉屹 (2011:36-53).

As other fragments of *The Laozi huahu jing* do not use *Mishihe* to designate Manicheanism and Zoroastrianism, we would seem to be on safe ground in assuming that here *Mishihe* refers to the Christian faith. In S.6963v, for instance, the twenty-fifth heresy is *Daxian* 大祆 (Zoroastrianism) that recognizes ten thousand ghosts and gods and reveres fire.⁸⁸ S.6963v, according to T.H. Barrett, was created “circa 740”.⁸⁹

Interestingly and yet mysteriously, this conception of *Mishihe* is also repeated in a number of fragments of a later text, *The Lidai fabao ji* 歷代法寶記. This source is a collection of stories about the short-lived *Baotang* School 保唐宗 of Buddhism that flourished in Sichuan province in southwestern China during the eighth century. Rong Xinjiang notes five fragments, S.516, P.2125, F261, P.2776 and P.3727.⁹⁰ I have discovered that the verso of Jinyi 304 (津藝 304 housed in the Tianjin Arts Museum of China) also uses the appellation *Mishihe* three times. Probably because the pertinent part is written in light red and is therefore not clear when it is printed in black and white, these occurrences have so far escaped scholarly notice and have barely attracted any attention.⁹¹

Intriguingly, Jinyi304v, S.516, P.2125 and F261 are different versions of the same copy; P.3727, on the other hand, is a short abridgement. They all tell the same story: in the country of *Jibin* 罽賓國, an ancient power occupying northeastern Afghanistan and Kashmir, the king had previously adhered to two heresies Manichaeism and Christianity. He later converted to Buddhism and began to seek out Manicheans and Christians, all of whom were not holy but simply human beings. As Wendi Adamek has edited S.516 and P.2125 and translated the story into English, I quote P.3727:⁹²

The King of Jibin practiced the heretical laws of Momanni (Mani) and Mishihe (Messiah) and did not believe in arhat (Buddhism). He killed the [Buddhist] sages who sweated and then bled white milk. Momanni (Mani) and Mishihe (Messiah) however were ordinary people and their blood did not transform. (罽賓國王信奉事外道末漫尼彌[彌]師訶法不信羅漢煞其聖者/遍體汗乃流白乳其末漫尼彌師訶[彌師訶]等同凡夫血無變現)

⁸⁸ For the transcription, see Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (2008:114).

⁸⁹ T.H. Barrett 2003:57, original italics. This chronology is basically agreed with by Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (2008:112), who traces the editions of *The Laozi huahu jing* and argues that the second roll was created between 712 and 731.

⁹⁰ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 2010:123-157, 2008, 2002, 2001:343-368, 1999, 1997.

⁹¹ Shanghai Chinese Classics Publishing House 上海古籍出版社 and Tianjin Arts Museum 天津市藝術博物館 1997:325. The pertinent paragraph is in the second frame of Jinyi304v, running from Col. 26 to Col. 32. The publishers have also printed a color plate (Colored Plate 8).

⁹² Wendi Adamek 2007:107, (Chinese) 307, (English) 308.

Turning to the dates of these fragments of *The Lidai fabao ji*, it is hard to make a conclusive suggestion. Mainstream scholars have utilized these fragments as if they were Tang texts. Their assumption hinges on the composition of *The Lidai fabao ji*. According to the fragments, as well as some other Buddhist accounts, all the stories contained in *The Lidai fabao ji* were collected to commemorate the memory of the abbot of the Baotang Monastery, Wuzhu 無住, who died in 774, and the compilation was completed no later than 779.⁹³

While I agree that there was a Tang source entitled *Lidai fabao ji*, I must point out that most, if not all, of the extant Dunhuang fragments of *The Lidai fabaoji* were copied at a fairly late period, very possibly after the fall of the Tang dynasty. The text on the verso of P.3727, for instance, is dated “955”.⁹⁴ Moreover, the phrases “the Tang Dynasty” 唐朝 and “the phrase in the reign of [Empress Wu] Zetian of the Tang Dynasty” 唐朝則天時 occur several fragments, long and short.⁹⁵ Very probably, as argued in 6.3.1, these fragments were (re)produced after the Tang court collapsed in 907. That is, these fragments of *The Lidai fabao ji* contain obvious redactions in later hands. They are not, and therefore cannot be, recognized as original Tang texts. Therefore, I deal with these scraps as the post-Tang sources.

6.4.1.2 *Bosifo* 波斯佛 and *Bosi* 波斯

More intriguingly, the concept Christianity being a heresy in the West is also echoed by S.6551v. This fragment records a Buddhist monk doing catechetical work among the ordinary people in Turfan. As suggested by textual clues like the official titles and the kings of the local Uyghur power, S.6551v was written around “930”.⁹⁶ As this source lists the Manichean Buddha, *Bosifo* and the Zoroastrian Buddha, *Bosifo* must be related to Christianity:⁹⁷

[...] when converting, in which Buddha shall we believe? He is neither the Manichean Buddha, nor the *Bosifo* [Persian Buddha] nor the Zoroastrian Buddha. It is the Sakyamuni Buddha. [...] In the West are 96 kinds of heresies among which are *Bosi* [Persian], Manicheanism,

⁹³ Other confirmed Dunhuang fragments are S.1611, S.1776V, S.5916, S.11014, P.2680 and P.3717. There is one more incomplete piece stored by the Ishii Sekisuiken bunko 石井積翠軒文庫 in Japan. In Turfan, archeologists also found another fragment Ch.3934r (now in the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin). As *The Lidai fabao ji* holds clues to understanding the early history of the Chan School of Buddhism, these fragments have attracted considerable scholarly attention. For two good summaries of the field, see Zhang Zikai 張子開 (2000), and Zhai Xinglong 翟興龍 (2015). For a short introduction, see Rong Xinjiang (2013:352). Lately, Wendi Adamek (2007) has examined these manuscripts in her doctoral project and has reconstructed a presumably original Tang text of *The Lidai fabao ji*.

⁹⁴ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 2001:354. The later phrase can be found in S.516, Jinyi 304v and F.261, the last of which has been transcribed by Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (1997: 239, Column 33).

⁹⁵ For more occurrences of these phrases, see Wendi Adamek (2007:316, 319, 320).

⁹⁶ Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 1989:33. The proposed date of S.6551v spans from 742 to 940. For a brief summary, see Wang Lanping 王蘭平 (2008:346-347).

⁹⁷ The transcription is cited from Zhang Guangda 張廣達 and Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 (1989:24).

Zoroastrianism and Crying to the Gods [Shamanism?]. They all say that the converts are ordained and are far removed from life and death. Yet all lie and cheat human beings and heaven [...]. ([.....] 歸依佛者，歸依何佛？且不是磨[摩]尼佛，又不是波斯佛，亦不是火祆佛，乃是 [.....] 釋迦牟尼佛。[.....] 且如西天有九十六種外道，此間則有波斯、摩尼、火祆、哭神之輩，皆言我已出家，永離生死，並是虛誑，欺謾人天 [.....])

6.4.1.3 *Bosiseng* 波斯僧

The time has now come to look more closely at the appellation *Bosiseng* 波斯僧, it occurs twice in S.1366, in which a clerk was recording the Dunhuang governmental expenditure on such items as flowers, oil, cloth and so on:⁹⁸

Bosiseng from Ganzhou [receives] a flower for the month: seven *dou*; oil: one liter. *Diesaugushi* [receives] a flower for the month: seven *dou*. On 26th, distributed one *shi* of flowers and three liters of oil to Bosiseng who offered medicines [to us]. (甘州/來波斯僧月麵七斗油一升牒塞 (?) 骨示月麵七斗廿/六日支納藥波斯僧麵一石油三升)

S.1366 is fairly incomplete. What has survived is the middle part. Scholars think that it can be matched with S.2474, in which Rong Xinjiang has studied the information suggested by the Chinese months and assigns “980”.⁹⁹ Although the name of *Bosiseng* is not specified, on the basis of the proclamation of the 638 edict in which Aluoben is called a *Bosiseng*, it can be argued that *Bosiseng* refers to Christians.

6.4.1.4 *I si Myi si ha*

The appellation *I si Myi si ha* is used in a Tibetan Buddhist source, Pelliot tibétain 351, that was made between 787 and the early eleventh century. As I do not read Tibetan, I cite G. Uray:¹⁰⁰

Man, your friend is named god I si Myi si ha and acts as Vajrapani Sri Sakyamuni, and when the doors of the heaven with seven layers will be opened, you will pursue the Yoga (= way of conduct) that you will receive from the judge at the right hand of God; and what (you) will have thought, do it without shyness, unsacred, undaunted. You will become a Jina (= you will become blissful). There will be no demons of sickness and impediments. This lot, for whatever cast, is very good.

⁹⁸ Ganzhou is a town 600 kilometers east of Dunhuang; *shi* and *dou* are Chinese measurements.

⁹⁹ Rong Xinjiang 榮新江 1996:371.

¹⁰⁰ G. Uray 1983:413, underlined added.

G. Uray claims that this quotation “represents a passage of a Nestorian text which superficially had been assimilated to Buddhism”.¹⁰¹ For example, ‘*l si Myi si ha*’ acts in the same vein as Vajrapani Sri Sakyamuni, one of the earliest bodhisattvas to appear in Mahayana Buddhism. Specifically, the Christian elements are suggested by two clues. Number one is that ‘*l si Myi si ha*’, in contrast to many phonetic transcriptions of ‘Jesus Messiah’ in other languages, “can only have derived from the Chinese form 移鼠迷師訶”, *Yishu Mishihe* used in *The Messiah Sutra*.¹⁰² Number two is that the concepts ‘judge at the right hand of God’ and the ‘seven heavens’ match these Christian sources as the Bible and the Nicene Creed.¹⁰³ As this dissertation has argued that *The Messiah Sutra* was created after 800, whether the Tibetan transcription is derived from the Chinese phrasing or not does require more investigation.

6.4.2 Three crosses in Tibetan manuscripts

The following three images are crosses drawn in three manuscripts, Pelliot tibétain 1182, Pelliot tibétain 1676 and IOL Tib J 766. The first two have been studied by Géza Uray; the last one has been first published online by Sam van Schaik.¹⁰⁴ As far as I know, the last cross has not been discussed in print by other scholars.

The image in Pelliot tibétain 1182 is a Sasanian cross (Fig.6.14). Each limb is of equal length, and their extremities have been added with a short line, forming four more small crosses. In contrast, the sketch in Pelliot tibétain 1676, is a Greek cross (Fig.6.15). All the arms are equal in length and breadth. The cross in IOL Tib J 766 (Fig.6.16) is a cross typical of those used by the Church of the East, especially in China. It is decorated with three pearls at the end of each arm, and the bottom arm is longer than the other three that seem to be equal in length.

The forms of these crosses are extremely interesting. Their forms, especially the Greek cross, could indicate that not all the Dunhuang Christians belonged to the Church of the East. However, these manuscripts contain nothing Christian besides these crosses. Pelliot tibétain 1182 seems to be a fragment of a longer piece that the scribe used to hone his Tibetan writing skills. Pelliot tibétain 1676 is a long copy of a Tibetan Buddhist source, the *Prajñāpāramitā*, and the cross seems just happened to have been jotted down in the top margin of the texts. IOL Tib J 766 is “just a strip of paper, probably an offcut from a

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 418.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 416.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 416-418.

¹⁰⁴ Sam van Schaik 2007; G. Uray 1983.

manuscript, which has been used as a doodle pad by a scribe.”¹⁰⁵ In the light of present knowledge, it is hard to arrive at a detailed conclusion, including the reason these images were sketched.

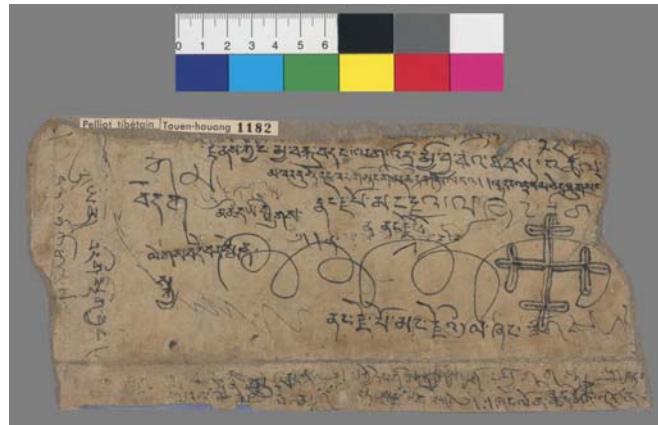


Figure 6.14 A Sasanian cross in Pelliot tibétain 1182

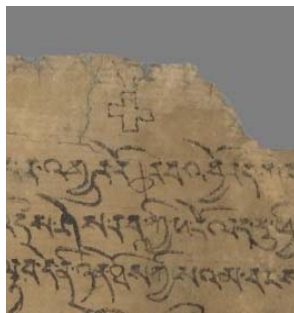


Figure 6.15 A Greek cross in Pelliot tibétain 1676



Figure 6.16 A cross in IOL Tib J 766

Nevertheless, the dates of these sketches are workable. All the manuscripts are written in Tibetan – the writing of IOL Tib J 766 is in Tibetan and in a Sogdian or Uighur script. As Tibetan did not become the ‘official’ language until the Tibetan Empire conquered Dunhuang in 787 and still continued to be used after the Tibetan power was overthrown in 848, it can be assumed that the sources were copied between 787 and the sealing of Cave 17.¹⁰⁶

6.5 Conclusion

Christians maintained a continuous presence in Dunhuang from the eighth century up to the eleventh century. As far as can be inferred from the information available, Christians seem have established themselves in Dunhuang on a more stable footing by the late eighth century although an earlier presence is possible. Although the two dated Kojima Forgeries A and B were most probably made in the early twentieth century, the other two Christian sources, *The*

¹⁰⁵ Sam van Schaik 2007.

¹⁰⁶ See also G. Uray (1983:420).

Mysterious Bliss Sutra and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*, are authentic texts written between 745 and 787. During the ensuing one hundred years or so, the number of Christians in Dunhuang could have grown. They created the Sogdian fragments — a business letter, a religious text — and one painting with the crosses decorated with pearls in a style preferred by the Church of the East in the Tang central plains. All these sources suggest that Dunhuang Christians were not isolated. They were in contact with other Christians. After Tang China collapsed in 907, Dunhuang Christians continued to maintain a modest presence. Religious manuscript P.3847 confirms that the post-Tang Christians were well informed about their predecessors. The bronze cross B105:2 would appear to attest that Cave 105 was the tomb of a Christian who was buried before the turn of the twelfth century.

This observation about the historical presence on the basis of Christian sources seems to tie in with the information contained in the Chinese and Tibetan sources, none of which can be dated earlier than the second half of the eighth century; the majority were made between the ninth century and the first decade of the eleventh century. Appellations like *Mishihe* and *Bosiseng* used in several Chinese fragments are assuredly related to Christianity. Even though the passage in the Tibetan Buddhist source Pelliot tibétain 351 that contains the phrase *l si Myi si ha* requires more research, the sketches found in other Tibetan fragments are of Christian crosses. The cross decorated with pearls in IOL Tib J 766 bears a very close resemblance to the images of the crosses made by the Church of the East in China. Clearly, as suggested by these appellations and sketches, Christians were present in Dunhuang and their presence did not escape the notice of the other non-Christian residents.

Admittedly, this sketch of pre-twelfth-century Dunhuang Christians is still rough. However, this local four-century uninterrupted presence strongly suggests that the historical presence of Christianity in pre-twelfth-century China is a much more complicated picture than its common narrative, that has been introduced in Chapter 1, would imply. The first chapter of the historiography of China's ancient Christians has to be rewritten and an initial attempt at this task will be undertaken in the following concluding part of this dissertation.

Conclusions and Implications

When I began to investigate the first statement of Christian faith in China, I had not expected that the re-reading of the seven putative earliest Christian manuscripts removed from Dunhuang Cave 17 in 1900 would turn into such an empirical, philological and technical undertaking. My initial goal was to explain how minorities represented their religious beliefs in a powerful culture through translation. Nevertheless, a thorough perusal of these manuscripts revealed that they presented many unsolved problems and that, if not tackled, these obstacles will result in an unconsciously gerrymandering of the sources.

One of the most salient stumbling-blocks is their chronology. In the field, these manuscripts — more precisely, the eight titled texts written on them — are currently assumed to be sources used by the Tang church, an offshoot of the Church of the East that entered China in 635 and allegedly disappeared after 845. However, this chronology has never been substantiated by any hard evidence. The prevailing dating in these primary sources, as pointed out by Matteo Nicolini-Zani, is “based on an almost uncritical acceptance of a small amount of uncertain data and on the passive transmission of many unfounded assumptions.”¹

Therefore, this project abandoned the interpretative, theoretical and narrative approach, and turned instead to digging out solid evidence that would provide a sound foundation for the dating of all the earliest Chinese Christian manuscripts. Now this work has drawn to an end, the time has come to propose a new chronology of these manuscripts and to anticipate some of the directions in which future scholarship might go.

1 A new chronology

This research reveals a new chronology that differs radically from the traditional dating. In order to refine the difference, this section will adhere to the conventional order of discussing these manuscripts and pull the findings together so as to assign new dates to each source.

1.1 The date of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*

Very probably, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were newly written by one scribe in the period of Late-Tang, Five-Dynasties and Early-Song, say between 800 and the early eleventh century. This conclusion rests on five statements, each building on its predecessor.

¹ Matteo Nicolini-Zani 2006:38.

The first statement is that the two manuscripts could only have been made after Christianity was first introduced to China. The postulation that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were made *before* the founding of the Tang church must be abandoned. The main reasons for this assertion are offered in Chapters 1 and 2.

Tracing the earliest introduction of Christianity to China, Chapter 1 demonstrates that a pre-seventh-century presence is hypothetical and that the Tang church is still the first clear evidence of the presence of Christianity in China. The chapter points out that conditions in the seventh century would have favored such a venture. The Church of the East had been strengthened in the wake of the Nestorian controversy centered on Christology that erupted in the fifth century and had established several metropolitans in Central Asia. Meanwhile, China was unified by the Li family that established the Tang Dynasty in 618, had by and large embraced an open worldview and welcomed many immigrants from far and wide in Asia. Importantly, the contemporaneous Tang evidence, although not ample, is diverse and has been accumulating over the past 400 years. There are stone inscriptions, religious texts, Tang edicts and a few sporadic clues contained in Chinese annals and other sources. Despite the fact that many details still remain unclear, the presence of the Tang church and such specific dates as the year 638 when the Tang court officially consented to Aluoben propagating his faith are undeniable and have been confirmed by other sources.

Chapter 2 demonstrates that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are indisputably ancient Christian manuscripts. The codicological features suggest that they are common Dunhuang manuscripts. The synopsis reveals that they are religious texts and are largely intelligible. The former narrates Gospel stories in a fairly detailed way. Generally speaking, it can be matched to biblical teachings. The latter, although its three essays have been put in the wrong order, is devoted to explaining one theme, One God, and some parts of its third essay can also be matched to Gospel stories.

Consequently, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not made before Christianity gained an institutional profile in China, that is, in the Tang period. Intellectually the creation (translation) of two such long sources would have required a considerable amount of theological training and, more pragmatically, financial support. In pre-seventh-century China, it is inconceivable that stable Christian communities would have been able to have found its feet simply on the basis of some occasional visits by individual Christian travelers. Before the Tang church, there would have been no need to make religious texts in Chinese. These two

texts can only have been created when there was a community both stable and sizable enough to need to use Chinese texts to nourish its faith.

The second statement about the new dating for *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* is that their traditional chronology is wrong. The two existing manuscripts were not created by the first missionary, Aluoben, in 635-638 and 641 respectively. They cannot have been the originals that were used by Aluoben to discuss his religion with the second Tang emperor, Taizong. Three reasons support this refutation.

The first reason is that the traditional dating is not supported by any evidence. As argued in Chapter 2, it does touch upon the possibility, suggested by the historical event: Aluoben did translate some texts. This event is documented by the 781 Xi'an Stele and the colophon of manuscript P.3847. However, neither source specifies that *The Messiah Sutra* or *On One God* was among these texts, let alone that the two surviving sources are the very versions sanctioned by Tang Taizong. In addition, as shown in Chapter 6, *The Sutra of Reverence* contained in P.3847 also strongly suggests that the two sources were not made by Aluoben. Although it lists thirty-five titles of sources that were made by Aluoben and Jingjing, strangely enough *The Sutra of Reverence* does not record the titles of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*.

The second reason is that the customary argumentation is not convincing. As analyzed in Chapter 2, the date of *The Messiah Sutra* (635-638) is based on the date of *On One God* (641). However, Haneda Toru, who first noted the Chinese numeral 641, was not confident about this date for *On One God*. Although he clearly knew that the two sources were written in the same hand, Haneda Toru never assigned the date of *On One God* (641) to *The Messiah Sutra*. Instead, his argument was that *The Messiah Sutra* had been made before the mid-Tang (mid-eighth century). The nub of the problem is that the original context in which the numeral 641 is mentioned is far from clear. It is impossible to determine whether this numeral refers to a specific year or to a time-span. Furthermore, there is no way of knowing whether the point of reference is the death of Jesus Christ or some other event. In other words, Haneda Toru's tentative dating of *On One God* is taken for granted as a fact, an acceptance that in its turn fuels speculations about the date of *The Messiah Sutra*. Moreover, the historical, philological and doctrinal aspects examined by P.Y. Saeki, who proposed that *The Messiah Sutra* was older than *On One God*, are dubious. As pointed out in Chapter 2, these three arguments do not stand up to closer scrutiny. By and large P.Y. Saeki's observation rests upon faulty premises

and fallacious reasoning, for instance, the out-dated idea that translation is a progressive process and the later translation would necessarily be better than the earlier translation.

The third reason for rejecting the older date of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* is that the alleged author, Aluoben, would have not only offended his great patron, Tang Taizong, but also greatly anticipated his time by using the taboo forms of complex characters. Chapter 3 shows that these two documents are inconsistent in their avoidance of Tang Taizong's name. On the one hand, *shi* 世 and *min* 民 are not tabooed, and *shi* and *min* 愍 occur in their normal forms. On the other hand, Tang Taizong's name, demonstrated by three complex characters, *die* 牒, *qi* 棄 (from *On One God*) and *hun* 昏 (from *The Messiah Sutra*), was indeed tabooed. In the original manuscripts, for instance, the right top element of *die* 牒 was changed into 云. Given that name taboo was a demanding, enduring tradition, this egregious violation reveals that the two Christian manuscripts could not have been the versions that were presented to the Tang court. In fact, the method of avoiding complex characters, *gaijian*, was only officially promulgated in 658 by Tang Taizong's son, Tang Gaozong. It was a new technique. It differs from the *quebi* method, whose first instance is dated 648. The promulgation of the *gaijian* method is recorded in *The Jitangshu* and is also confirmed by inscriptions on Tang tombstones carved between 618 and the 660s. In the five volumes of rubbings examined in the course of this research, the taboo forms of *die* 牒, *hun* 昏 and *die* 諫 do not occur on any pre-658 stones. Had he been the author, it would seem that Aluoben was far ahead of his time.

The third statement I want to make about the new date of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* is that they were not copied between the 650s and the 760s or indeed soon after. There are four reasons for this assumption. The first three are offered in Chapter 4. First and foremost, neither of the two sources avoids *zhi* 治, the given name of Tang Gaozong. *On One God* actually employs the very orthodox form of *zhi*. The second reason is the non-taboo of Empress Wu's name, *zhao* 曌, and their neglect of Wu's New Forms. Between 689 and 690, Empress Wu introduced eighteen new forms of seventeen characters in five consecutive batches. As she promoted these new forms for political reasons and with the full panoply of state power behind her, all new forms were widely accepted and used, quickly replacing their orthodox orthographies. Among 422 tombstones carved between 689 and 704, only one inscription fails to employ any of these new forms. All other 421 inscriptions adhere strictly to the prescriptive edicts. In stark contrast to these stones, neither *The Messiah Sutra* nor *On One God* adopts any of these new forms. All the characters that correspond to the new forms

have been written their orthodox orthographies. The only suspicious case, 惡 might have been the new form of *chen* but is demonstrated to be a scribal error of *e* 惡. The third reason is that neither source avoids the name of Tang Xuanzong, *longji* 隆基. In *On One God*, the character *ji* 基 is written in the orthodox form. The fourth reason, as argued in Chapter 1, is that the Tang church of this period initially enjoyed an impressive rise during the reign of Tang Gaozong, who bestowed a high official title on Aluoben. However, it suffered serious setbacks when Empress Wu took over rule in China and reversed the religious policy. Although Christians made endeavors to stabilize the position of the church and did regain Tang Xuanzong's patronage in the 720s, the recovery was modest and of short duration. During the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763) when the Tang court had to flee, China's heartland was ravaged, and the Tang church probably did not have sufficient resources to re-establish itself properly.

The fourth finding to support the new timeline of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* is that their texts were newly created no earlier than the Late-Tang and the Five-Dynasties period. This is demonstrated by their use of passives. As argued in Chapter 5, the frequency of the employment of passive markers in the two Christian sources matches the common usage in the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period. In the eighth century and thereafter, the changes in the way Chinese passive was indicated are pretty obvious and the rise of *bei* is irrefutable. Whereas the use of *yu* and *jian* had almost disappeared and *wei* continued to fall, *bei* was asserting itself everywhere. In poems composed by Li Bai and Du Fu in the first half of the eighth century, 40 percent of passive sentences are *bei* constructions. In Bai Juyi's poems, composed somewhat later between the end of the eighth century and the early ninth century, 70 percent of passive examples are *bei* constructions. Toward the middle of the tenth century, *yu* and *jian* had died out, *wei* occurred only spasmodically and more than 90 percent of all occurrences contained *bei*. In a nutshell, *bei* was the dominant marker. By the early eleventh century, *bei* seems to have been the only passive indicator applied by Chinese users. Turning to the use of the passive in *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God*, the proportion of the use of *bei* is 90 percent that is much higher than of its occurrence in Li Bai's and Du Fu's poems. It even exceeds its use in Bai Juyi's poems and essays, approaching the number of occurrences of the passive in the mid-tenth century source *The Zutangji* (94%).

Moreover, the use of the rare order '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' clearly indicates that the two Christian texts were not redacted. The coalescence of the '*bei* + verb' order with *jiangqu* had been introduced in the fifth century. All pre-eighth-century examples are of the '*bei* + verb1 +

verb2' order, in which *jiangqu* is a verb. As *jiangqu* lost its verbal status in the eighth century and was reduced to an ending, the coalescence developed into the 'bei + verb + *jiangqu*' order. During the following centuries, this new order continued to expand. Examples can be found in sources made not only in Dunhuang but also in the Chinese heartlands and on the southern Chinese coast. Nevertheless, before the twelfth century, its use remained fairly limited. Most sources yield only one occurrence. In *On One God*, however, not only is this order used more frequently than in other sources, in the three instances in which it does occur it also employs *jiangqu* as an ending rather than as a verb. Given this fact, it is strange that someone who seems to have had a marked tendency to use this particular order would have intentionally employed it to replace the original passive sentences of the pre-eight-century sources. The most plausible explanation for the use of this rare order is that it was adopted naturally in conformity with the then general practice. In other words, the two Christian texts were newly created when the 'bei + verb + *jiangqu*' order was in common use.

The fifth statement to buttress the new chronology of *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* is that the strong possibility that the manuscripts were newly created between the Late-Tang and Five-Dynasties period and the sealing off of Dunhuang Cave 17. Besides the fourth statement, two other arguments support this inference. The first of these is related to the inconsistency of the tabooing Tang Taizong's name. As said in Chapter 3, Tang Taizong's name was widely avoided throughout Tang China, and it even remained tabooed for a while after the Tang had collapsed. Pertinently, the taboo forms of complex characters had been being used so long that they seem to have become accepted as common forms, frequently employed alongside their orthodox orthographies. The taboo forms of these complex characters including *die* 𪚩 and *hun* 昏 that occur in the Christian documents were, as observed by a thirteen-century official Zhang Shinan, still being resorted to on an impressive scale in his own time. Therefore, the inconsistency in the observance of the taboo suggests that the Christian manuscripts could have been made long after Tang Taizong died, or in a very much later time when the force of the taboo had either waned or had been officially abandoned.

The fifth statement is given even more support by the recorded pre-twelfth-century presence of Dunhuang Christians. As argued in Chapter 6, Christians first appeared in Dunhuang after the eighth century. A seventh-century presence has not been confirmed. Should *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* have been made in the seventh century, these two Christian sources would seem to have been completely isolated instances of Christian writings. Apart from

these two sources, no other contemporaneous texts have been found. Cogently, not a single clue contained in any evidence found in Dunhuang can be dated to the seventh century. Conversely, if *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are shown to be much more recent, the two sources look far less isolated. The closer we approach the time of the closure of the Dunhuang Cave 17 in the early eleventh century, the less the isolation of the two sources becomes. Especially from the Late-Tang and Five Dynasties period (the ninth century and thereafter), the wealth of evidence grows and the presence seems more diversified. Secular Sogdian sources demonstrate that Christians in Dunhuang were in contact with the outside world and this knowledge opens the door to the strong possibility that new Christians were then coming to China from the West. Despite this influx of newcomers, Chinese religious texts and silk paintings would also seem to indicate that some local Christians were descendants of the original adherents of the Tang church. Given this continuous presence, *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* could be just two among many other sources made by Dunhuang Christians in a later period.

1.2 Kojima Forgeries A and B

Kojima Manuscripts A and B are not Tang texts but modern forgeries. Not only do the manuscripts themselves contain inexplicable variations, a number of critical points in their earlier contextualization also cannot be accounted for.

The most salient point in this argument is that their authenticity has been doubted by scholars ever since their first publications. Although P.Y. Saeki published them as Tang texts that bear the dates 720 and 717 respectively, Haneda Toru was chary about endorsing this opinion. He noticed that the use of *Daqin* predates the Chinese Designation-change Edict promulgated in 745.

The second point is that the latest research has confirmed Haneda Toru's suspicion. Scholars reiterate the textual variations by demonstrating the ways in which the Kojima Forgeries A and B differ from other Christians sources in terms of the use of some key theological terms like Messiah and God. They also reveal that other points, although accepted, are puzzling. They have discovered that Li Shengduo or the larger Li family from whom Yasushi Kojima allegedly purchased the two sources in the 1940s did not own these two manuscripts. The actual slip that was supposedly written by Li Shengduo himself does not match his calligraphy. Strangely, this important piece of evidence was printed by Haneda Toru, but it was never noted by P.Y. Saeki and has now long been lost.

Thirdly, as demonstrated in Chapter 6, other points are highly suspicious. P.Y. Saeki was not clear about when he firstly learnt of (the photos of) the manuscripts. He never bothered to clarify whether it was 1943, 1944 or 1947. Compounding this uncertainty is the fact that the Japanese collector Yasushi Kojima remains a mysterious figure. Both Haneda Toru and P.Y. Saeki did claim that Yasushi Kojima was their friend, but it seems that neither of them actually knew him and, when it is all said and done, they barely mention him. Moreover, for some mysterious reason Yasushi Kojima sent two different sets of photos to Haneda Toru and P.Y. Saeki simultaneously, and he, it appears, wanted to keep both his recipients in the dark about each other. As stated in Chapter 6, Haneda Toru certainly had no idea that P.Y. Saeki had also received the photos.

In light of these arguments, it is reasonable to believe that Kojima Forgeries A and B were made in the first half of the twentieth century and therefore they cannot be used as Tang Christian sources. As for this forgery business, if Yasushi Kojima was not the mastermind behind it, at least he seems to have been directly implicated in the fraud. We suggest using the phrase ‘Kojima Forgeries A and B’ to label the two dated manuscripts.

1.3 The date of *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*

This research finds that the traditional dating of *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* can be accepted. However, Chapter 6 does set further limits on the time-span, proposing that the two manuscripts were produced between 745 and 787.

The most prominent reason for this assertion is that they were written in the same hand.

Secondly, they are unquestionably authentic ancient manuscripts. Both were stamped by Li Shengduo with his personal seal and he annotated them. A second version of *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* has been found on the Luoyang Pillar dated 829 that was discovered in 2006. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 6, the variations in the two versions are few and far between and are on the morphological level. Most parts are exactly the same.

The third factor that endorses this dating is that the name taboo practice suggests *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* was copied no earlier than the reign of the Tang emperor, Ruizong. The taboo example is *dan* 旦, a complex character whose right element is the given name of the emperor, *dan* 旦.

Historical events also give some clues to the dating of *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra*. As said in Chapters 1 and 6, Dunhuang was conquered by the Tibetan empire in 787 and was re-captured by the Tang court in 848. Therefore, it seems that *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* was made before 787.

Lastly, the use of the term *Daqin* suggests that *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* seems to have been made after 745.

Taking all the evidence together, the conclusion has to be that these two manuscripts were written in one hand between 745 and 787.

1.4 The date of manuscript P.3847

It is hard to date each part of P.3847 as a separate piece. The seal is broken and illegible. It is certainly possible that *The Praise of the Three Majestics* and *The Sutra of Reverence* could be Tang texts. However, this assumption still has to be substantiated by hard evidence. Given the current state of knowledge, it is impossible to venture any opinion beyond the claim that the whole manuscript P.3847 was made after the collapse of the Tang court, perhaps sometime between 907 and the sealing-off of Dunhuang Cave 17.

The evidence is the phrase ‘Emperor Tang Taizong’ used in the colophon. In Tang China, the use of such a phrase was extremely rare. Few Tang sources place the name of the dynasty, Tang, in front of Emperor Taizong. More often than not, Tang people placed laudatory characters in front of the actual dynasty’s name (Tang). Or they simply wrote ‘Emperor Taizong’. As noted in Chapter 6, phrases like ‘Emperor Tang Taizong’ do often appear in sources made after the dynasty fell.

1.5 An overview of the new chronology

From the data that can be extrapolated from the foregoing summary, only five Chinese Christian religious manuscripts were taken out of Dunhuang Cave 17. Not a single one of these manuscripts can be dated to the seventh century. All were made in rather later periods. Their new chronology is:

Two Tang manuscripts were made between 745 and 787:

1. *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* 志玄安樂經
2. *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* 大秦景教宣元本經

Two manuscripts, including the texts they contain, were newly created between 800 and the early eleventh century:

3. *The Messiah Sutra* 序聽迷詩所經

4. *On One God* 一神論

Manuscript P.3847 was made after 907 and before the early eleventh century. It contains two texts, that we cannot confirm to be Tang texts:

5. *The Praise of Three Majestics* 三威蒙度讚

6. *The Sutra of Reverence* 尊經

2 Implications

This new chronology has far-reaching significance. Given the research topic, this section will focus on drawing its implications for the history of Christianity in China. After this, in the next section more and broader implications will be proposed as future directions for research.

2.1 *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* are not modern forgeries

The theory that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were forged in the early twentieth century is untenable. It emerged from the general interest in forgeries of Dunhuang manuscripts, and was first suggested in the year 2000. But it has never been proved. Taking another tack to counter the criticism of other scholars who have focused on orthographies and transcribed Syriac words, this dissertation shows that the general arguments propounded in the forgery theory are heavily based on presuppositions. As argued in Chapter 2, these presuppositions have been shown to be either untrue or problematic and none stands up to closer scrutiny. Furthermore, the premise that *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were the official texts used by Aluoben to discuss with Tang Taizong has been refuted by this dissertation.

Even more importantly, this research has also demonstrated that few people, if any, would have had the knowledge to forge these two manuscripts. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, even today scholars still do not fully understand the taboos on the complex characters that can also be found in the two Christian manuscripts. In fact, before 2010, not a single expert on the Tang church knew anything about the taboo form of *die* 牒. Its handwritten form has been transcribed incorrectly as 片京, a form that cannot be found in any dictionary and is very

probably a modern invention. Moreover, as shown in Chapter 5, a more thorough knowledge of the evolution of the Chinese passive was only began to be built up in the early twentieth century. The thick, historical, descriptive method of studying Chinese was not systematically introduced into China until the 1930s. A great deal of what we know about the evolution of the Chinese passive has only been produced by second-generation scholars, especially those publishing since the 1980s. Even today, the rare order '*bei* + verb + *jiangqu*' still remains virtually unknown. Only two examples had previously been collected and first reported in the 1990s. Therefore, it is very unlikely that a forger in the early twentieth century could have been so far ahead of his time that he was better informed than many of today's best experts. The knowledge he would have had to command of Chinese taboos and language including Syraic would have been too accurate and too erudite to be credible.

2.2 Dunhuang Christians must be understood in their own right

Dunhuang Christians have to be understood in their own right. The local presence of Christians in Dunhuang must be clearly delineated and thoroughly analyzed before it can be utilized to examine the presence and position of ancient Christians in China. Although it is too early to make any claim that they had developed their unique identity or customs, their local presence was unquestionably continuous for at least four centuries.

As indicated by the sources dealt with in Chapter 6, Christians had established themselves in Dunhuang no later than the late eighth century. During the ensuing couple of hundred years, they kept their feet firmly planted in this oasis well into the twelfth century. Among these Christians, some seem to have been newcomers who maintained spasmodic contact with the West and preferred to use Sogdian in their written communications. Nevertheless, this Christian community almost certainly also included descendants of adherents of the Tang church. These converts had been accustomed to using Chinese as a vehicle in which to write religious texts and to create religious images with special elements that can be seen far more prominently on many inscribed stones from China's central plains than those found on stones from Central Asia. Moreover, they were also fairly well informed about their ancestral Tang legacy.

2.3 Revisiting the traditional historiography of China's pre-twelfth-century Christians

The traditional historiography of China's pre-twelfth-century Christians must be revisited. The overall picture, sketched in Chapter 1, has to be re-drawn.

First and foremost, our current knowledge about what is called the Tang church has to be modified. A great deal of what is commonly believed sits uneasily with the new chronology set out above.

Abiding by the conditions of this new timeline, it is obvious that a great deal about of Tang theology is still unknown. In our present state of knowledge, it seems that no religious texts made in the seventh century have come down to us. All Christian sources known so far have been dated to the eighth or ninth century. In fact, only two religious texts made in the Tang central plains have come to us. One is the small religious section on the Xi'an Stele that is dated 781. The other is the other version of *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao* carved on the Luoyang Pillar that was erected in 829. Even if it were to be insisted that Dunhuang once fell under the auspices of the Tang court and consequently Dunhuang manuscripts can be used to analyze the Tang church, only two more manuscripts, *The Mysterious Bliss Sutra* and *The Sutra of the Origins of the Daqin Jingjiao*, could be referred to with any certainty. Even were they to be used, according to this new chronology, they are eighth-century documents.

The findings of this research have revealed that an enormous amount of knowledge about the presence of the Tang church still waits to be revealed. So far all that is possible to produce is only a rough picture of the bare outlines. Most of the information available is still that contained on the Xi'an Stele, that documents the history of the previous 150 years. Besides this Stele, there are a few Chinese sources like the 638 Diffusion Edict and the 745 Name-change Edict. After the year 781, information about the Tang church is fragmentary and widely dispersed. In fact, the 845 Intolerance Edict is the only official record that has so far been identified. Besides these official sources, there are three dated stones, *Mi Jifen muzhi*, *Huaxian muzhi* and the Luoyang Pillar. They bear witness to the fact that a number of Christian families remained living in Xi'an and Luoyang in the early ninth century and they appear to have been using two church buildings at the time at which it was erected. These stones shed some light on religious practice, church organization and the day-to-day life of the Tang Christians. As they have only recently been found, they have still not been properly contextualized.

The final point to be made in this context is that the traditional narrative of the tragic fate of the Tang Christians seems to be inaccurate. The impact of the 845 Intolerance Edict seems to have been exaggerated. This edict was more concerned with economic matters than with religion. It did not command church office-bearers to renounce their faith. It simply ordered

them to return to the ranks of the laity. In the eyes of the Tang court whose economic foundation was an agricultural economy, these religious people had adopted an unproductive profession that cloistered them to their monasteries all year round and made them completely dependent on people like farmers who produced the essentials of life. Importantly, the purport of this edict is tailored to religious people and does not target laymen like individual converts. As Christian families or clans or even individuals were unquestionably engaged in production and were not dependent on others to support them, the edict ignores them. Consequently, they were free to continue to practice Christianity and perhaps they offered religious people shelter after the edict had been promulgated and the latter had been forced out of their monasteries. Pertinently, the force of this edict was short lived. Tang Wuzong died only a few months after its promulgation. As the new emperor was a supporter of Buddhism, he revoked it. Its revocation would have meant that the religious people could have again returned to their monasteries, resumed their preaching and the propagation of their faith in areas adjacent to the Tang capital.² That is to say, not all Tang Christians necessarily left China's heartland after 845.

The underpinning of this premise sets us on a search for the post-Tang church. As stated in Chapter 1, it is conventionally assumed that the post-Tang period the church had ceased to exist. This assumption seems to have been too gloomy. On the basis of the evidence adduced in Chapter 6 and the new timeline set out for the Chinese Christian manuscripts, it is conceivable that Christians did continue to dwell in the Chinese central plains after the Tang court collapsed in 907.

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility to speculate that a fair number of these post-Tang Christians were descendants of Tang Christians. Nevertheless, some might have been related to the Dunhuang community. As shown in Chapter 6, Dunhuang was home to a sizeable number of Christians before Cave 17 was walled up around 1006. These Dunhuang Christians, as the Sogdian business letters clearly reveal, maintained contacts with the outside world. Moreover, as attested by Chinese Christian manuscript P.3847, some Dunhuang Christians used Chinese to write sources and also knew about their Tang predecessors. Given how geographically close they were and their undoubted linguistic advantages, it is feasible to suggest that some Dunhuang Christians, especially missionaries, could have traveled to the plains of China and taken up residence there.

3 Future directions

² For the restoration of Buddhism after 846, see Stanley Weinstein (1987:136-144).

Future research has a number of issues on which to focus.

For instance, we should delve deeper into the local Dunhuang Christian presence in a search for answers to a number of questions: How did Dunhuang Christians maintain contact with the outside world? Did they communicate with other strongholds of the Church of the East along the Silk Road like Turfan? What form did their religious life take? What was the position of Dunhuang in the church hierarchy? In order of seniority, did Dunhuang rank before or after Xi'an and Luoyang? How was the church organized in ancient China?

These questions set us the challenge of re-analyzing all the Chinese Christian religious manuscripts and from them deduce the lines of development or patterns of ideas and beliefs. Having extrapolated more data from them, we should be in a better position to reconstruct the theology of ancient Dunhuang Christianity. In particular, we must re-interpret *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* within the confines of their ninth-tenth-century cultural milieu, and explain why the scribe (author?) dropped many elements and produced manuscripts plagued by a number of meaningless, gibberish sentences.

Another challenge facing us is to re-think the society (culture) of Tang China in the context of producing a re-depiction of China's ancient Christians. For instance, to what degree do common labels like cosmopolitanism, early Tang, high Tang, mid-Tang and late Tang truly reflect Tang society?

This refined new chronology can, of course, be narrowed down. To accomplish this mission, another task will have to be undertaken: the substantiation of the situation by reference to historical records and archeological discoveries.

Admittedly, this research raises more questions than it has answered. Nevertheless, what has been established in this dissertation is clear cut. *The Messiah Sutra* and *On One God* were not the work of Aluoben, penned sometime around the 640s. The Kojima Forgeries A and B are modern products and must not be taken as Tang Christian sources. Unquestionably post-Tang Chinese Christian manuscripts do exist. Whereas Dunhuang Christians most certainly deserve to be understood in their own right, the Tang church needs to be re-described, and post-Tang Christians are still waiting to be revealed. In sum, the overall picture of pre-twelfth-century Christians in China is much more complicated than it was ever thought to be. Their whole story is crying out to be re-told. Or perhaps, more aptly it is still waiting to be told.

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Summary

Ever since the seven so-called earliest Chinese Christian manuscripts were removed from Dunhuang Cave 17 in 1900 and published by the first generation of scholars, they were quickly and widely recognized as sources used by the Tang church, an offshoot of the Church of the East that entered China in 635 and allegedly disappeared after 845. Their conventional chronology, although widely accepted, is far from certain. This empirical, technical and philological work is the first systematic attempt to date these sources and the first book-long discussion of their chronology. It is also the first monograph to propose that the local Dunhuang Christians deserve to be examined in their own right.

The methods used in this research are related to historical events (the earliest arrival of Christianity in China and the time at which Cave 17 was sealed), a very demanding tradition (the imperial name taboo), orthographies promoted by the state (Empress Wu's new forms) and historical linguistics (the evolution of Chinese passive). All methods have been utilized by scholars, Chinese and Western alike, to date old sources. Although a new dating method has not been introduced and no cutting-edge laboratory work (like Carbon-14 dating and non-destructive technologies) has been brought into play, the traditional dating methods have yielded surprising results:

Firstly, the putative earliest manuscripts might be the latest sources.

Secondly, the only two dated manuscripts are modern forgeries.

Thirdly, only two manuscripts are actual Tang documents.

Fourthly, manuscript P.3847 is the work of post-Tang Christians.

Chinese Christian Manuscripts		Old Chronology	New Chronology
<i>The Messiah Sutra</i> 序聽迷詩所經		635-638	800-1010s
<i>On One God</i> 一神論		641	
Kojima Forgeries	Kojima Forgery A 大秦景教大聖通真歸法讚	720	modern forgeries
	Kojima Forgery B 大秦景教宣元至本經	717	
<i>Mysterious Bliss Sutra</i> 志玄安樂經		late eighth century	745-787
<i>Sutra of Origins of Daqin Jingjiao</i> 大秦景教宣元本經			
P.3847	<i>Praise of Three Majestics</i> 景教三威蒙度讚	late eighth century	907-1010s
	<i>Sutra of Reverence</i> 尊經		

This new chronology has a far-reaching significance. It compels us to draw a picture of a local Dunhuang Christian community that maintained a continuous presence from the eighth century well up into the twelfth century. It also prompts us to alter our current thinking about the institution known as the Tang church. In addition, it challenges the present consensus that Christianity was extinguished after 845. Finally, as a whole, all the findings give us food for thought and encourage us to rethink the traditional historiography of pre-twelfth-century Christianity in China.

Samenvatting

In 1900 werden in Grot 17 in Dunhuang de zogenaamde zeven oudste christelijke Chinese manuscripten gevonden. Na hun publicatie door de eerste generatie geleerden werden ze algemeen gezien als bronnen van en voor de Tang christelijke kerk. Deze kerk was een loot aan de stam van de Kerk van het Oosten, die in China was aangekomen in 635 en waarvan werd aangenomen dat ze was verdwenen na 845. De conventionele chronologie van deze teksten is vrijwel algemeen geaccepteerd geraakt, maar rust op aannames die verre van zeker zijn. De empirische, technische en filologische studie die het hart vormt van deze dissertatie is de eerste systematische poging om deze bronnen nauwkeuriger te dateren en hun chronologie in kaart te brengen. Het is tevens de eerste monografie die bepleit dat de Dunhuang christenen als lokaal verschijnsel bestudeerd dienen te worden.

Dit project maakt gebruik van methoden die zijn ontwikkeld voor andere soorten Chinese teksten (afkomstig uit Dunhuang en andere plaatsen) en past deze methoden toe op de Chinese christelijke teksten uit Dunhuang. De belangrijkste methoden die gebruikt worden houden verband met de historische randvoorwaarden voor datering: de komst van het christendom in China (635) en het moment waarop Dunhuang Grot 17 werd afgesloten (1007). Het betreft veeleisende tradities in het schriftsysteem (het keizerlijke naamtaboe en de zogenaamde 'nieuwe vormen' van Keizerin Wu) en historische taalkunde (de ontwikkeling van de Chinese lijdende vorm constructies). Deze methoden zijn alle gebruikt door andere geleerden, zowel Chinese als Westerse, om oude bronnen te kunnen dateren. Nieuwere technieken voor datering, zoals C-14 datering en niet-destructief technisch laboratoriumonderzoek kunnen nog niet worden toegepast op deze handschriften, maar het traditionele filologische onderzoek in deze dissertatie heeft al tot verrassende resultaten geleid:

Ten eerste: de handschriften waarvan werd aangenomen dat ze de oudste zijn zijn waarschijnlijk de meest recente.

Ten tweede: de enige twee gedateerde handschriften zijn moderne vervalsingen.

Ten derde: slechts twee van de handschriften bevatten daadwerkelijk teksten uit de Tang periode.

Ten vierde: het manuscript P.3847 is het werk van post-Tang christenen.

Chinese christelijke manuscripten		Oude Chronologie	Nieuw Chronologie
<i>The Messiah Sutra</i> 序聽迷詩所經		635-638	800-1010
<i>On One God</i> 一神論		641	
Kojima teksten	Kojima A 大秦景教大聖通真歸法讚	720	Moderne vervalsingen
	Kojima B 大秦景教宣元至本經	717	
<i>Mysterious Bliss Sutra</i> 志玄安樂經		late achtste eeuw	745-787
<i>Sutra of Origins of Daqin Jingjiao</i> 大秦景教宣元本經			
P.3847	<i>Praise of Three Majestics</i> 景教三威蒙度讚	late achtste eeuw	907-1010s
	<i>Sutra of Reverence</i> 尊經		

Deze nieuwe chronologie heeft verstrekkende gevolgen. Zij leidt tot een beeld van een lokale christelijke gemeenschap in Dunhuang die een permanente aanwezigheid heeft gehad van de achtste tot zeker in de twaalfde eeuw. Dit leidt dan weer tot een aanpassing van het standaard beeld van de Tang christelijke kerk. Bovendien toont deze chronologie aan dat de algemene consensus dat het christendom na het intolerantie-edict van 845 uit China verdwenen zou zijn dient te worden verlaten. Deze reconstructie zou moeten leiden tot een proces van heroverwegen van de traditionele historiografie van het christendom in China voor de twaalfde eeuw.

Curriculum Vitae

Jianqiang Sun was born 24 November, 1980, in Tengzhou, Shandong province, China. He enrolled in Zaozhuang Teachers' College in 1999 and was trained to teach English in China. He continued his studies at Yantai Teachers' College and graduated with a BA in English literature in 2003. After graduation, he worked in different companies in China and was engaged in translation, international business, shipbuilding, engineering, port construction among other enterprises. In 2007, he returned to Yantai Teachers' College, now renamed to Ludong University, and obtained an MA in Foreign Linguistics and Applied Linguistics, more precisely Translation Studies, in 2010. After obtaining his master's degree, he was again engaged in heavy industry like casting-forging, machining and producing equipment for nuclear power plants. In 2012, he began his doctoral project on the Tang Christian church at Leiden University in the Netherlands.